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MAR 1928

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# FAR WEST
## *ILLUSTRATED*

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Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1928, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. **All Rights Reserved.** Entered as Second-class Matter, August 4, 1926, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian subscription, $2.36. Foreign, $2.70.

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# GOOD READING

BY

## CHARLES HOUSTON

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The bee to the open clover,
And the gypsy blood to the gypsy blood
Ever the wide world over."

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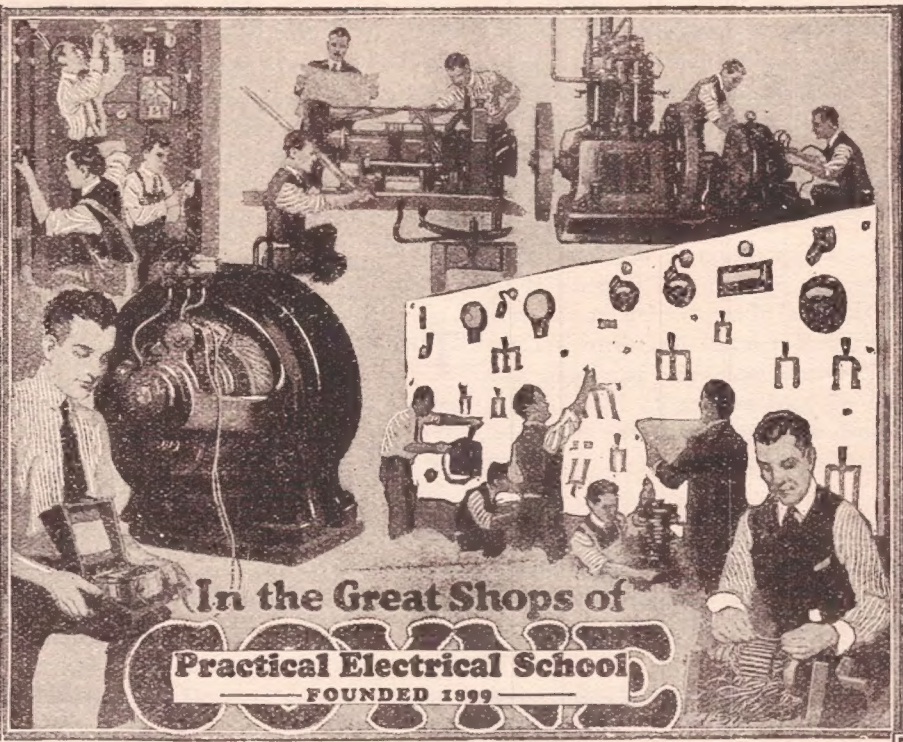
*Continued on 2nd page following*

GET INTO ELECTRICITY

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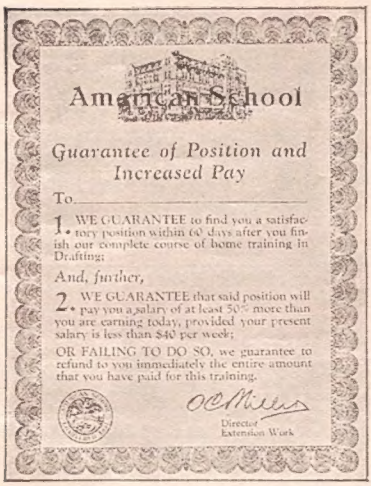
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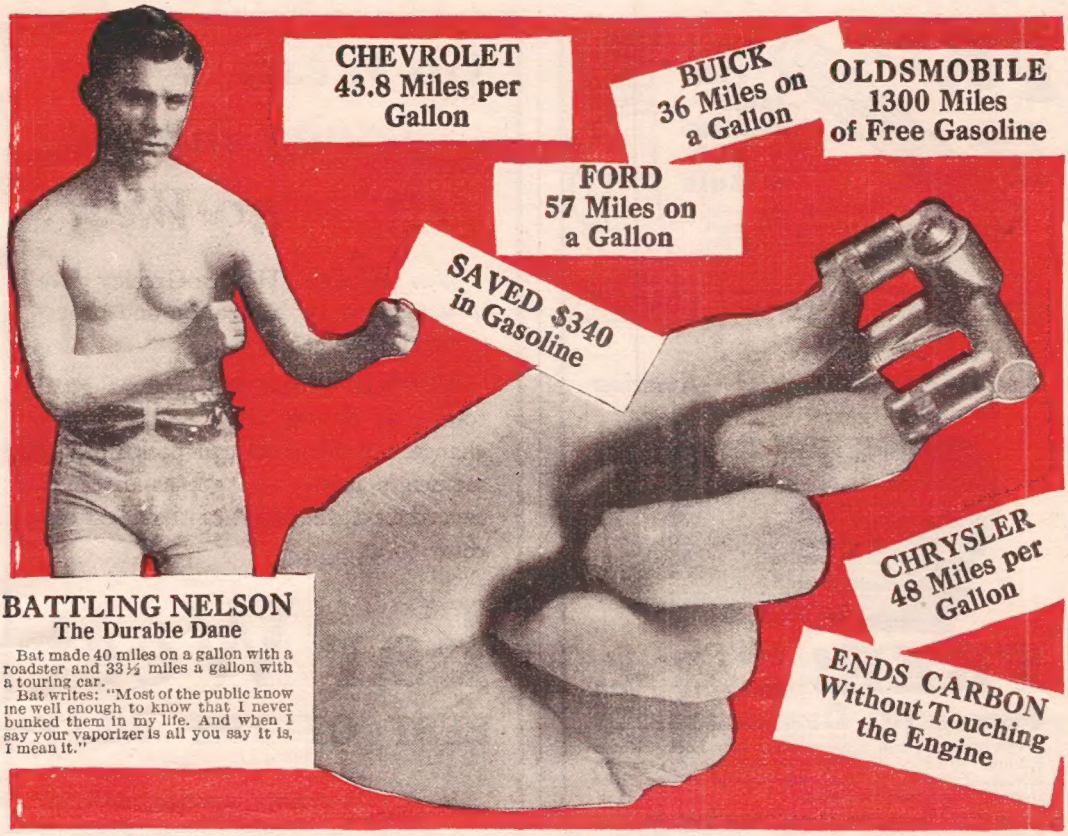
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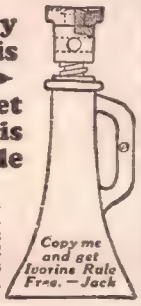


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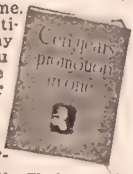

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FAR WEST
ILLUSTRATED

MARCH
1928

# The Blazing Hill

By Johnston McCulley

Illustrated by N. Eggenhofer

*Men cut and shot at each other, at friend and foe alike.*

*Life was cheaper than loyalty in Quebrada; and the arsenal that loomed above the town was the greatest menace of all.*

## CHAPTER I.

### THE BOLTED DOOR.

AS the rurales dashed by, holding their weapons in readiness, the bright red of the reflected flames, playing on their contorted features, Martin Shale sprang back into the doorway. His breath coming in gasps, he flattened himself against the wall and looked over the scene of confusion toward the other side of the plaza, where the buildings were afire and the flames sprang toward the black sky.

"Down, señor!" cried some one at his side.

He fell flat at the command, acting mechanically; and the act was not a second too soon. A volley came from the buildings opposite, buildings already aflame, where the revolutionists were making a stand. Rurales dropped in the street. But from the maze of cursing men and screaming horses, came another volley that crashed against the adobe walls, and a pall of smoke hid the scene.

"Not yet, señor!" the unknown warned, as Martin Shale would have risen to his feet.

And so Shale waited for a time, flat on his face, knowing that there would be an answering volley from the revolutionists trapped in the buildings. It came soon. Again there was the heavy crash, again the shrieks and groans. Once more there was a heavy pall of smoke. And then the smoke drifted away, and Martin Shale saw rurales battering at the doors, firing toward the roofs, and some lying still in the plaza, their fighting at an end.

"Now, señor! Arise and run along this side of the plaza. There is a slim chance."

For the first time, Martin Shale looked at the man who had helped him. He knew him, at first glance, to be a sergeant attached to the headquarters staff, Torello by name.

"Thanks!" Shale muttered. "It's a right hot night, to tell the truth."

"Quick, señor, for the love of the saints!" Torello gasped. "You Americanos—so brave and foolish! You must reach the end of the plaza and hurry from there to headquarters. It is safe there, as yet. You are from across the line, and will receive protection. This is a sorry night, señor—a black stain on the army, on Mexico, on this cursed town of Quebrada, which always has been the abode of evil!"

Martin Shale glanced into the street again. The rurales, urged on by their officers, had battered down the doors and were rushing into the adobe buildings. There they would meet desperate men who knew that they were cornered and doomed—men who would fight to the last. Knowing this, still the rurales did not hesitate.

Martin Shale knew that the rurales, constables of the waste places in Mexico, so little understood, were worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with the Royal Northwest Mounted Police and the Texas Rangers. He knew their courage and ability.

"Poor fools in there!" he heard Torello say. "Their mutiny comes to a swift end. When will they learn that a handful of men cannot upset a government?"

"I think," Martin Shale said, "that we can reach the end of the plaza now."

Running side by side, they left the protection of the doorway and sprinted along the faces of the adobe buildings, dodging wounded and kicking horses, jumping over groaning men, fearing to look back at the battle, not knowing for sure whether those they met were friends or foes. That was the worst of rebellion in the dark—the difficulty of telling friends from foes.

They came to the corner of the plaza, gasping for breath, half exhausted, their eyes smarting because of the smoke. Martin Shale started to the right.

"Not that way, señor!" Torello warned. "Down this little side street and away from the square!"

They sped down the dark side street, a narrow, twisting thoroughfare, heavy with evil odors. A revolutionist stepped from a doorway, caught sight of Torello's uniform and knew him for a foe. He lifted his gun, but before he could fire, Torello had shot him through the head. Then they ran on.

They turned into another street, and proceeded toward the headquarters of the government troops. Suddenly they found before them a mob of frenzied men engaged in a street conflict—men who cut and shot at each other, at friend and foe alike.

"Señor, we cannot pass this way!" Torello cried. "We'll have to go through some building and out the back."

"Lead the way!" Martin Shale commanded. "I don't know this end of the town."

"How come you here, señor?"

"I started out this afternoon and was caught. But, anyway, I wanted to see the scrap," Shale explained. "I'm an American and a Texan, and a good fight appeals to me. The next time somebody tells me that a Mexican revolution is comic-opera stuff, I'll smash him in the mouth!"

"Comic-opera stuff!" Sergeant Torello echoed. "So that is what they think of it, señor? We die the same as men of other countries, do we not? As a nation, we are working out our destiny. It must be worked out in blood, as other nations have worked out their destinies." Suddenly he grasped his companion's arm. "Come, señor, this way!"

Torello started for the nearest doorway, his revolver held ready for instant use. Then a score of screaming, screeching, frenzied men bore down upon them, for Torello had been recognized as a loyal man, and with him was a gringo. And at such

times, gringos were hated, because it was believed that they wished to meddle in Mexico's affairs.

Martin Shale drew his revolver, also, for he saw plainly that he could remain a neutral no longer. He saw Torello's pistol flash, saw one of the revolutionists reel and fall. Then he seemed to awaken to a full realization of the situation, and sprang to the sergeant's side.

"Through them!" Shale shouted.

He extended his arm and fired twice. The revolutionists fell back, and the path to the door was growing clearer. Shale fired again, and another man fell. It was his own weapon he was handling, one he had used on the range across the line; and Martin Shale could shoot!

He felt a hot sting in his shoulder. The wound did not amount to much, but he could not repress a groan at the shock. Torello cursed, and fired at the man who had shot Martin Shale.

Other revolutionists were charging down the street, now, toward the scene of the fighting. Torello staggered back against Martin Shale, and Shale believed him to be badly wounded. But he was straight on his feet again, almost immediately, and rushing forward. Shale followed a step behind.

They were almost through the mob now, almost to the door that promised sanctuary. If they could only get inside that adobe building and close the door, their foes would be held at bay for a short time at least, time enough for them to get out at the rear and flee through the darkness. Shale looked back and fired into the mob until his last cartridge was gone; he reloaded as he ran. Sergeant Torello hurled a man aside, and sprang at the door.

"Make it quick!" Shale cried. "They're on us, hombre! We've got to move suddenly or not at all!"

Once more he emptied his gun. There was no time to reload. Hurling his empty weapon into the face of the nearest foe, he swung around, and dashed to Torello's side. The worst of it was over, he thought.

"Open the door!" Martin Shale cried.

But Sergeant Torello's answer struck terror to his heart.

"Señor, the door is bolted!" he said.

"Smash it!" ordered Shale.

"It is heavy, señor, and it will take time. This is the end!"

## CHAPTER II.

### OUTSPREAD ARMS.

FOR an instant, Martin Shale stared at him, his mind seemingly unable to comprehend the predicament. Then, suddenly, he knew fear, the fear of a brave man who finds himself helpless. He thrust the sergeant aside and beat against the door as though he did not believe what Torello had told him.

The men in the street rushed forward their bestial cries ringing above the din of constant firing, the cries of hunters about to make a kill. Martin Shale and Torello were like rats in a trap. Escape cut off; there seemed nothing left to do but die at the hands of these infuriated men, with such courage as they could command.

The injustice of it flashed through Martin Shale's mind. He was an American. He had not taken sides in this trouble below the border. He was only a spectator. Why, then, should he die at the hands of these revolutionists who were so terrible in the hour of defeat, who, knowing their cause lost, were merely trying to do all the damage possible before punishment overtook them?

And Elizabeth Hemton, daughter of an American rancher, who was to be Martin Shale's wife, was somewhere in this cursed town of Quebrada, in danger. Shale had come south for her, sent by her father to take her from the danger zone. Was she to die, too?

Shale whirled and started to spring toward the advancing men. There was some half-insane idea in his mind of fighting his way through that frenzied mob and gaining freedom, of going to the assistance of Elizabeth Hemton. But, whatever his idea, nothing came of it, for Torello had read him aright. His left hand closed over Shale's wounded arm with such force that Shale almost fainted with the sudden pain.

"Back, señor! You have no gun! It is folly!" Torello cried.

He hurled Martin Shale to one side and stood in front of him to shield him. There Shale crouched for a moment, against the closed door, Torello's bulk between him and the weapons of the mob.

The next instant, the men in the street charged. They did not wish to kill, but to capture and torture. A sergeant of the

rurales and a gringo would make rare sport, they thought.

Torello struck, and the first man fell back. Then they jammed in upon the pair, so close that they dared not fire for fear of shooting a comrade. Torello's cry of pain brought Martin Shale to his feet again. A knife had found its mark, and Torello's face was stained red. There came a sudden lull—the lull before the last rush.

Then again they rushed. Again they hurled Martin Shale and Torello back against the door. Suddenly, Shale felt the door give way behind him, swing open quickly. The next instant, he had sprawled into the building, and Torello after him. Before Shale could get to his feet, the door was slammed and barred, and the mob outside, half mad with rage and disappointment, were hammering at it.

"Down!" somebody cried in Shale's ear.

Shale sprawled again, Torello with him. The volley which came crashing through the door did them no harm. Instantly they were upon their feet again and running through a tiny corridor into a large room. Martin Shale brushed a hand across his eyes and turned to look at his rescuer—to find himself looking at a beautiful woman.

Martin Shale had seen her twice before, and knew her instantly. She was Señora Martinez, wife of a colonel, a beautiful woman, vivacious, proud, haughty.

"Señora," Shale began, weakly.

But she ended his speech with a gesture. "Quickly, señors!" she cried. "You are far from safe yet! Those men outside are fiends just now, not human."

"But——" Shale began.

"This way, señors! Follow me!" she commanded impatiently.

They followed her to the stairs, Torello staggering and Martin Shale scarce better able to proceed. They crossed the room and entered another narrow hall, and, at the rear, came to a flight of stairs that ran to a second story. Down below, the men in the street were battering at the door, determined to get at the fugitives. The door could not resist them long.

"Into this room!" commanded Señora Martinez, as they came to the head of the short flight of stairs.

They staggered into the room. There was a trapdoor in the ceiling, which led to the flat roof of the building. Once on the roof, it would be an easy matter for them to get to the roofs of other buildings, drop down at some place where it was dark, skirt the plaza, and make their way to headquarters.

Torello leaned against a wall and braced himself there, fighting off the unconsciousness that would have claimed him. Martin Shale pulled a heavy table across the floor, put benches and chairs upon it, making a desperate effort to reach the trapdoor above. A crash from below now told them that the street door had fallen. Cries of rage announced that the men from the street were already upon the stairs.

Martin Shale reached the trapdoor finally, tugged at the bolt, and, after some difficulty, lifted the door and swung it back. The sky was flaming red, the fires were spreading. That section of the town was doomed.

"Quick!" he cried. "You first, señora! If they find you, the wife of a loyal officer——"

"No!" she cried in answer. "This soldier first—he is wounded."

"But, señora," Shale protested.

"This soldier first!" she repeated. "Do not delay. These men will not harm me."

"Not harm you? The wife of a loyal officer?" Martin Shale cried. "Señora, you are mad, crazed with fear!"

"This soldier!" she commanded, once more.

The men had started to climb the stairs. Martin Shale sprang down from the chair and dashed across the room to Torello. If Señora Martinez persisted in standing there, waiting for death, it would be folly, he decided, to waste three lives when some of them might be saved.

"Quick, Torello! To the trapdoor!" he cried.

Then he stepped back and gave a cry of despair. Sergeant Torello's fight against unconsciousness had failed; he collapsed and dropped to the floor. And how was Martin Shale, without help, to get his heavy body up to that trapdoor and through it?

The men from the street were halfway up the stairs. Señora Martinez glanced across the room and saw what had happened.

"Quick, señora!" Shale ordered. "We

cannot save him. But you can be saved." She glanced at him, but did not reply. And then, to his horror, she deliberately stepped out through the door and to the head of the stairs, in plain view of the maddened men.

"They'll kill you!" Shale cried, starting toward her.

But she stopped him with a gesture, stopped those frenzied fiends also, and caused them to stand like men of stone, open-mouthed, weapons dropped to their sides.

Martin Shale was shocked, astounded for an instant. Then it occurred to him that those men had stopped from sheer astonishment at suddenly seeing her there.

But he was wrong. As he watched, as he begged her to come back, as he looked around wildly in search of some weapon to protect her, she walked straight to the head of the stairs and threw wide her beautiful arms.

"Back, señors!" she commanded. "Back! These two men are under my protection. You are making a mistake! Ask me no questions now, but retire!"

They hesitated for a moment, their rage cooling, muttering among themselves. Then they turned and went slowly back down the stairs, through the little hall, and out into the street, like men ashamed.

And this was Señora Martinez, wife of Colonel Martinez, of the general's staff! Why had not the men of that mob of revolutionists slain her? Or why had they not seized her and held her for ransom, that they might obtain the release of their captured comrades who were sure to face a firing squad?

## CHAPTER III.

### THE TRAITOR.

MARTIN SHALE stared at her in wonder. She whirled upon him, her eyes blazing.

"Señor, you wish to reach headquarters alive?" she asked. "Then you must act quickly. I may not be able to stop them again."

She hastened across the room to Torello, who had regained consciousness and was trying to prop himself up against the wall. Shale followed her, and, together, they made Torello understand what they were to do.

How they ever got through the trap and across the roof, Martin Shale scarcely could tell afterward. But finally they were up, the door fastened behind them, and were hurrying over the buildings toward headquarters.

But they were not safe yet. On the roofs behind them, foes saw them and started in pursuit, firing wildly as they ran. Bullets whistled by, uncomfortably near. Martin Shale was thankful for the flickering of the light from the fires, and for the drifting clouds of smoke that made aim uncertain.

Señora Martinez hesitated once, but, when Shale urged her to come she hurried on. He was between the two, Torello leaning heavily against him.

Finally they reached the trapdoor in the headquarters building. Shale began unfastening it, kicking and pounding upon it to attract the attention of those below, for the trap might be fastened on the inside, too. But, fortunately, it was not so secured, for those in the building were on the lower floor and did not hear him.

Shale lifted the door and motioned for Señor Martinez to descend the ladder. She hesitated for an instant, but after a glance back at the pursuing men, she obeyed. Shale helped the sergeant down, then descended himself, and bolted the door on the inside. They were safe in the headquarters building.

For a moment they remained there, breathing heavily, listening to the patter of running feet overhead, Torello fighting against unconsciousness again.

"Señora, I don't know how to thank you," Shale said. "You sure and certain saved our lives."

"You were brave men. I saw you fighting those fiends in the street."

"But how did you happen to be there?" Shale questioned. "Why were you not here, safe in headquarters?"

Her face burned, and she turned away abruptly without speaking.

"Señora Martinez——" Shale began.

Torello, who, since receiving his wound, had taken no active part in the proceedings, staggered forward, on hearing that name. "Who did you say?" he cried. "Who saved us?"

"The wife of Colonel Martinez," Martin Shale replied. He knew, now, that the sergeant had, in his weakened condition,

scarcely been able to fight off unconsciousness, had, indeed, hardly known what was going on, to say nothing of observing his savior. At the repetition of that name, however, he looked at her sharply.

"Señora Martinez!" Torello cried. "Señora," he went on, "I thank you from my heart for saving me and my friend, this American señor. But I cannot help saying, señora, that I wish somebody else had done it!"

"Torello! Are you mad?" Martin Shale cried. "You're out of your head, man!"

"Out of my head, am I, señor? It is not that. It is that I am a loyal soldier of my country, and so dislike to have my life saved by a traitor!"

"Torello! You're crazy!" Shale cried. "You don't know what you're saying. You've been wounded, and you're weak."

He whirled to look at the woman. Her face was burning again, and there was a peculiar expression in it. She was looking straight at Torello. There was no blame in her eyes. Her bearing was almost regal.

"Each of us, sergeant, is entitled to a personal opinion," she said, calmly. "Still, I am glad that I saved your life. You are a brave man, señor!"

Then she turned away.

"Señora, I'm downright sorry for this," Shale said, walking after her. "He's wounded and doesn't know what he's saying. Just forget his words."

"But I do know what I am saying!" Torello cried, staggering toward a bench.

"You'd better go to your own room, señora!" Shale continued. "If you want me to go along——"

"No!" she cried.

"Not go to your own room? But, señora, it is safe there," Shale persisted, puzzled by her protests.

Shale thought that the ordeal had been almost too much for her, that she was on the verge of collapse. He took her firmly by the arm and led her into the hall. He had decided to see her safely in her own quarters and then summon a surgeon for Torello.

She hesitated before a closed door. "Kindly leave me now, señor," she said. "I thank you for your courtesy."

"I reckon that I'm the one who should do the thanking," Shale returned. "If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't be here.

*The men in the street*

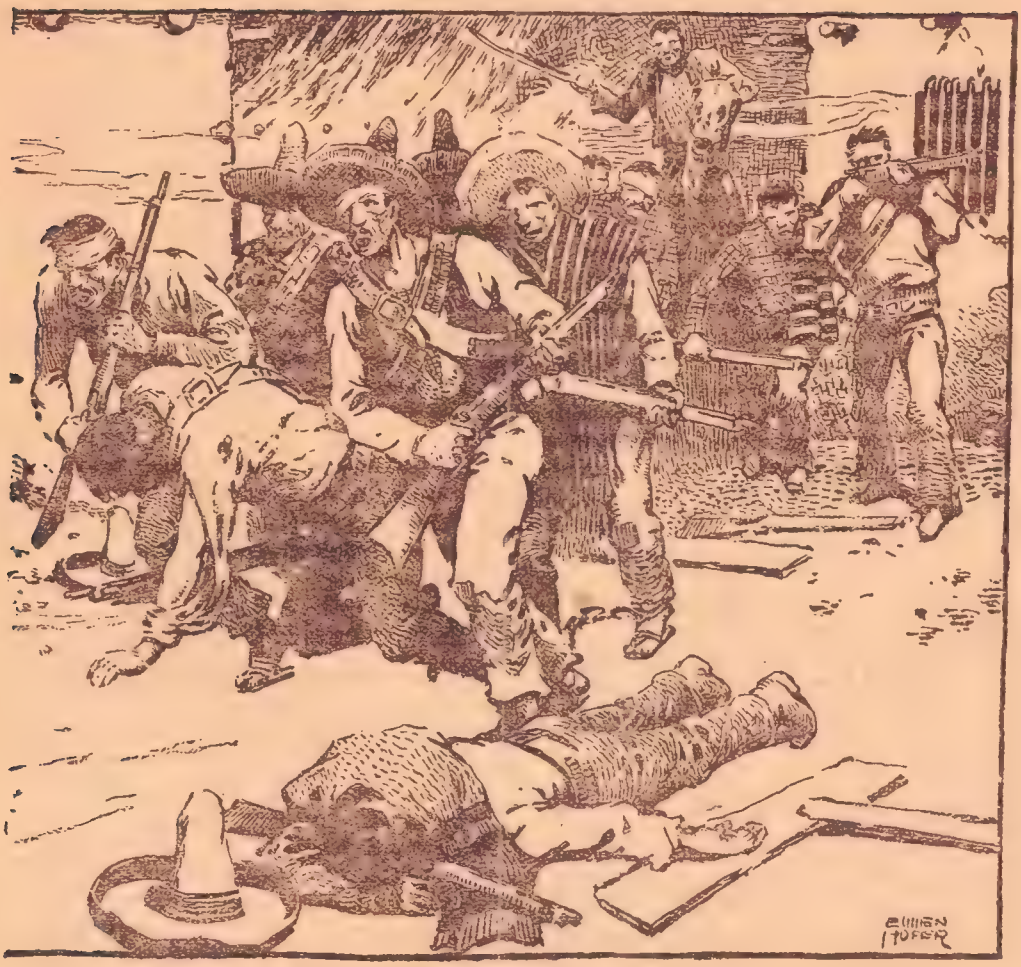
Those men were downright eager to exterminate me."

"We'll talk about that at another time," she promised, smiling at him weakly. "Leave me now, please."

Shale hurried back to the wounded Torello. It was with some difficulty that he got him to the lower floor. There he called a surgeon. His own wound was only of the flesh variety and soon dressed, and afterward he went down to the officers' room to tell of his escape and gather the latest news. He found the officers' room a scene of confusion. Soldiers were dashing back and forth, calling to one another. Some had been wounded.

"Here is Shale!" one cried. "How are things in the streets, Shale?"

"And how did you get back?" another demanded.



*rushed forward, their bestial cries ringing above the din of constant fire.*

"I wouldn't have got back at all, if it hadn't been for a woman," Shale replied.

"Through the streets?"

"Over the roofs," Shale corrected. "And about one jump ahead of a mad mob that wanted my hide."

"But how did you get into a building?" Colonel Martinez asked. "Did you find a door unlocked and unprotected? All doors in the square are supposed to be barred and bolted, to guard against the rebels reaching the headquarters building and catching us in a pretty trap. I can't understand how you got in."

"A sergeant, Torello by name, found me," Shale explained. "We started an escape together. We fought our way to a door, but found it bolted inside. We were at the end of our rope, when the door was opened, and we got in."

"Then a guard heard you?" Martinez asked.

"It was a woman," Shale replied. "She sure did a nervy thing."

"A woman? What was a loyal woman doing there, with danger on every side? It was supposed that all women were out of the danger zone. Was somebody overlooked?" The query came from a deep voice behind Shale.

Martin Shale whirled around as the men near him came to attention. General Ambrosio stood there.

"I don't know how she came to be there, sir, but it sure was a fortunate thing for us," Shale said.

"Who was this woman?" General Ambrosio demanded.

"Sir, she was Señora Martinez," Shale replied.

Colonel Martinez gave a cry that was plainly one of distress. Shale glanced at him in astonishment. The other officers looked at him with sympathy written in their faces. The general's countenance had clouded, and he stepped swiftly across the room.

"It appears that we have another witness, gentlemen," the general said. "Colonel Martinez, do you doubt any longer?"

"Doubt what?" Shale put in. "What's wrong here? I should think that you'd be tickled pink because an officer's wife saved two men. Isn't that the sort of woman you want attached to the army? She had nerve, I can tell you!"

Colonel Martinez opened his mouth as though to reply, but General Ambrosio stopped him.

"Please be good enough to sit down, Mr. Shale," the general said. "I wish to ask you a few questions."

"All right, sir," Shale replied.

"You say that Señora Martinez opened the door for you?" asked the general.

"She sure did, sir," was Shale's fervent reply.

"And what happened after you entered the building?"

"Why, the señora showed us the way to the upper floor and the trapdoor in the roof," Shale replied. "While we were there, trying to get the trap open, the rebels smashed in the front door and got into the building. Then they started up the stairs."

"You got to the roof in time to evade them?" the general asked.

"As a matter of fact, we didn't," Shale said. "The sergeant went unconscious. He was wounded before we got into the building, and I wasn't able to get him up through the trap. The rebels were on the stairs. Señora Martinez wouldn't save herself and leave us there."

"Well, what happened, if you please?" the general asked impatiently.

"Señora Martinez went back to the head of the stairs and faced them," Shale said. "They stopped when they saw her. She told them to get out, that we were her friends. And they went away!"

Colonel Martinez sprang out of his chair.

"You lie, Americano!" he cried.

"What's that?" Shale snapped. "I don't take that kind of talk from any man!"

"You did not see my wife! I tell you she hasn't been out of her room to-night!"

"Look here——" Shale commenced.

"You did not see her!" the colonel repeated in passionate tones. "Say that you did not!"

Shale looked at them all in wonder.

"What's the meaning of all this?" he demanded. "What's wrong in the señora saving our lives? Don't I know her by sight? Didn't I help her over the roof? Didn't I leave her at the door of her room just before I came down the stairs?"

"You lie!" Martinez shouted.

General Ambrosio raised a hand in time to prevent Martin Shale from swinging his fist in the colonel's face.

"Señors, I believe that we have ample evidence," the general said. "Mr. Shale, I thank you! You have done my country a great service."

"How's that?" Shale asked. "By messing around here and getting in the way?"

"Is it not a service to aid in the conviction of a traitor?" the general asked.

Then Shale remembered that Sergeant Torello had called her a traitor, too.

"A traitor!" Shale cried. Are you talking of Señora Martinez, the wife of one of your loyal officers? You must be mad! What's Señora Martinez done?"

"She has done everything!" the general replied. "This cursed rebellion is of her making!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### ON TRIAL.

ONE of the officers stepped swiftly across the room to a window and threw aside the curtains. The bright light of the rising sun flooded the room. Heavy clouds of smoke in the distance told how the flames had spread.

General Ambrosio walked across to the window and pointed out over the little town.

"You see?" he said. "What can an army do without supplies? There are our supplies, going up in smoke and flame, our ammunition being destroyed, men dead and dying—all because of the perfidy of one woman!"

"You must be mistaken," Shale said. "I'm an American, and I'm not as much interested in this mess as some of you, of course, but I hate treason. And I also

hate to stand by and hear a good woman called a traitor."

General Ambrosio whirled toward him.

"Señor, you are a gentleman, and naturally would try to protect a woman," he said. "But this is a time of war, when the army must come first in everything. In time of war, a woman is only a human being. Man or woman—it is only loyalty that counts, when the fate of an army, perhaps of a nation, hangs by a slender thread. Do you not see for yourself how matters stand?"

"What do you mean?" Shale asked.

"The men who were after you, trying to kill you, stopped at a word from her, did they not? Had she been a loyal woman, wife of a loyal officer, would the rebels have obeyed her commands? Wouldn't they have tried to capture her, señor?"

"I thought maybe they obeyed her because they were astonished at finding her there. I thought they were paying respect to a woman of the upper class."

"You forget, señor, that we have other evidence," the general said.

Colonel Martinez sprang to his feet, stepped to the general's side, and saluted.

"Sir, I can stand this no longer!" he said. "I swear to you that my wife is not a traitor, that she was not out of her room last night, and that she was not absent yesterday when you say she was out arousing the rebels. But I am a loyal man, sir, and if my wife is proved disloyal, then she is my wife no longer!"

"The matter can be decided by court-martial, and at once," the general answered. It shall meet here, in half an hour." And, after giving the necessary orders, he left the room.

Martin Shale walked across to the window and looked out into the plaza. He remained there for a moment, thinking, then turned and went back to Colonel Martinez.

"Colonel, there must be some strange mistake about all this," Shale said.

"I always have considered you my friend," Martinez said. "You have come across the line on business often, and I have liked you. Yet now you would help convict my wife with a maze of lies!"

"Colonel, you don't know what you are saying," Shale told him. "Man, I tell you your wife saved Torello and me, and at the risk of her own life."

"And I tell you," the colonel returned, "that my wife has been suffering with neuralgia for two days, and has not left her room in this building."

"Her maid——" Shale began.

"She will not say that my wife has been absent."

"But she rescued the sergeant and me!"

"Why do you try to lie her life away?" the colonel cried. "What wrong have I ever done you?"

"None!" Shale replied, promptly. "We have been pretty good friends. There's some mystery here, and I reckon that it'll be cleared up pretty quick. But don't call me a liar again, Colonel Martinez! I've had enough of it!"

Martinez turned and left the room. Other officers crowded around Shale, trying to get him to tell more of the affair.

Shale had been at headquarters at noon the day before, and had left only to attend to business and to prepare to escort Elizabeth Hemton back to her father's ranch. The rebellion had broken out in his absence, and Shale had spent the afternoon and evening, getting back to headquarters.

Señora Martinez, they told him now, had absented herself from headquarters, had mixed with the rebels, had stirred them to new acts of lawlessness, and had promised to throw open the doors of the arsenal for them. She had been seen, had been heard by spies. There could be no mistake, for everybody in the regiment knew her.

"But she can't be a traitor!" Shale said. "What would be her object?"

They could think of none. Yet there were the facts that could not be denied.

The half hour came to an end. The guard moved a long table to the middle of the room, and the general entered and sat down at the head of it. Six other officers assigned to the court-martial took their places. They did not relish this service, for they had been friends with Señora Martinez, guests at her house, had danced with her, possibly had flirted with her a bit.

"Bring Señora Martinez before us!" the general ordered.

She came down the stairs presently, her face pale but inscrutable. The colonel supported her on his arm, and led her to a chair at the foot of the table. Then

he stood back against the wall, his arms folded, eyes flashing. He was still loyal to his wife, but doubt was commencing to enter his mind.

Slowly, impressively, the general read the charge against her. Her face grew white as she listened.

"Not guilty!" she answered, when the general had finished. Pride flashed in her eyes as she spoke, and something of scorn was in her face.

"Captain Gomez!" the general called.

Shale knew Gomez, and had little respect for him though the man had shown courage enough, on occasion. He was a renegade Cuban, a soldier of fortune who fought for profit.

Gomez was sworn in, and took the stand.

"Captain," said the general, "yesterday afternoon at one o'clock you left headquarters for the arsenal, to make certain requisitions for stores?"

"I did, sir."

"Did you see Señora Martinez?"

"I did."

"Where, if you please, and under just what circumstances?"

"I saw her at the end of the plaza. She was standing in the center of a group of men," said Gomez.

"Was she talking to them?"

"She was, sir."

"And what was she saying?"

"I cannot tell you that, my general. As I approached, she ceased speaking, and the men dispersed."

"Did you speak to her?" asked the general.

"I did, sir."

"Tell us of that conversation."

"I hurried up and asked whether those men had been annoying her," replied Gomez. "She replied that she had been talking to them, but that they had said nothing to her that could cause her annoyance."

"That was all?"

"No, sir," Gomez went on. "I suggested that it was dangerous for her to be upon the streets without an escort, in view of all this trouble. She replied that she felt safe enough, and was only taking a walk."

"This was about one o'clock yesterday afternoon?" the general inquired.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you offer to escort her?"

"I did, sir," Gomez assured him. "I asked whether she wished me to accompany her to headquarters. She replied that if I were a good soldier I would go on about my duties, and that she was a soldier's wife and was not afraid to return to headquarters alone. She laughed, showed me a revolver that she carried in her hand bag, and said that she could use it if necessary. I went on down the street."

"How was Señora Martinez dressed?" the general asked.

"In a walking costume of brown, trimmed with blue."

Martin Shale almost gasped. It was such a costume she had been wearing, when she had rescued the sergeant and himself.

"That will do," the general said.

But Colonel Martinez stepped forward. "May I take the liberty of cross-examining this witness?" he asked. "I have everything at stake in this trial."

"You may cross-examine the witness," the general conceded.

"Captain Gomez," said Martinez, "you say that my wife showed you a revolver and made the remark that she knew how to use it if necessary?"

"I did, sir."

"What sort of revolver?"

"A regulation revolver such as is used by officers of the line."

"You say that she carried it in her hand bag?"

"Yes, sir. She took it from the bag to show it to me."

"And it was between the hours of one and two yesterday afternoon when you saw her?"

"That is correct, colonel."

Colonel Martinez looked Gomez straight in the eyes. "That is all—for the present!" he said.

Gomez left the stand and sat down against a wall. General Ambrosio beckoned an orderly.

"Bring in the prisoner who was captured at midnight," he said.

The orderly disappeared, and presently returned, leading in a man, heavily ironed, a rough-looking specimen of humanity.

"You are under sentence of death for treason," the general said to the prisoner. "You deserted and joined the rebels. You are to be shot at sunset to-night. I am

going to ask you certain questions, and, as you hope for mercy hereafter, tell the truth! A dying man should not lie."

"I'll not die with lies on my lips!" the prisoner replied, gruffly.

"Very good! You were one of the men who left the ranks and joined the rebels?"

"You know that, general!"

The general pointed to Señora Martinez. "Have you ever seen this lady before?" he asked.

"Many times," the man replied.

"Tell us about it," pressed the general.

"I've seen her almost every day during the past week. She was talking to the men and telling them to join the rebellion."

"Then you admit that this woman was a sort of comrade of yours in the fighting?"

The man did not reply. He glanced swiftly at Señora Martinez. Then he knelt suddenly before her, and pressed his lips to the hem of her gown. She drew away from him.

"Lift him up!" the general commanded.

Two of the guards obeyed the command. The condemned man stood before the court again.

"I'll answer no more questions!" he declared, stubbornly.

"But you must, you shall!" Martinez cried, darting forward. "Your silence is worse than your talk. You know, as you hope for mercy in the next world, that you never spoke a word to my wife in your life, that you never saw her alone, without escort, talking to a group of men."

"I will answer no more questions!" the man said.

Señora Martinez arose and looked at him. "Speak, and tell all!" she ordered.

"Señora!" There was surprise and anguish in the man's cry.

"I command you to tell all! If you men are lying my life away, let your lies be good ones, and complete."

"Señora!" the man cried.

"Tell all—and tell the truth!" she commanded firmly.

## CHAPTER V.

### TO-DAY AT SUNSET!

THE condemned rebel blinked his eyes at her and made some show of emotion.

"Señora, you are a brave woman!" he said. "If you command——"

"Well?" the general snapped, impatiently.

"Señora Martinez spoke to the men, first in sympathy," the man said. "She told them how sorry she was that times were not better, and said that they were used as dogs instead of men. She said that the government was rotten, that the army was going to pieces because of the conduct of its officers——"

There was excited murmuring among the officers, at this; but the general silenced them. "Proceed!" he told the condemned man.

"She said that we were fools because we did not fight for our rights; she urged us to make a move. The men grew to revere and trust her after a few days. Then she said that she would see that the doors of the arsenal were opened."

He paused for an instant, and looked through the window.

"They were not opened, and so we failed," he went on. "But we still had faith in her. We fought as well as we could. That is all. I have spoken because the señora commanded it."

Martin Shale glanced at Señora Martinez. Her face was white, but there was a look of scorn in it.

"That is all," the general said. "Call Sergeant Torello."

Shale sprang to his feet as Torello entered, and helped him to the chair, then went back to his place against the wall.

"Sergeant Torello," said the general, "you are a loyal soldier and a brave man. Speak the truth!"

The sergeant was sworn in.

"You saw Señora Martinez yesterday afternoon?" the general asked.

"I did, sir," was the prompt reply.

"You were detailed to go around the town and look for signs of rebellion?"

"I was, sir."

"When, and under what circumstances, did you see the señora?"

"I was in a group at the end of the plaza when she talked to the men."

"What did she say?"

"She was telling them to rise and seize the arsenal and start a rebellion. She told them to strike at four o'clock in the afternoon, at change of guard. She said that the doors of the arsenal would be thrown open, that she would get the keys from her husband, the officer in charge."

Colonel Martinez would have sprung forward, but other officers held him back. His wife looked straight at him, her eyes denying everything, but Shale, who was watching closely, saw that doubt was growing in the colonel's mind.

"Did an officer approach while she was talking?" the general asked.

"Captain Gomez came up to us," the sergeant replied. "The men dispersed, and I went along with them, not wishing to be suspected. The captain talked with the señora for several minutes."

"And then?" the general prompted.

"Captain Gomez went on toward the arsenal."

"Where did Señora Martinez go?"

"She entered a building five doors from headquarters, the same building before which Señor Shale and I fought off the rebels late in the night, and where she opened the door for us."

"You are certain it was Señora Martinez?" was the eager question.

"I am certain, sir," replied Torello firmly.

"That is all. Colonel Martinez, do you wish to cross-examine this witness?"

"I have no questions!" the colonel said.

Martin Shale went up beside him. "Don't give up, man!" Shale urged. "There must be some mistake."

The colonel looked at him, but did not reply.

Next the general called Shale's name. He took the stand and told, under oath, the same story that he had told before.

"You are certain it was Señora Martinez?" the general asked.

"I'm certain that it was the señora who opened the door and saved us," Shale replied. "But there is surely some mistake."

"I wish that we could think so," the general replied.

He turned to the señora.

"Have you any witnesses?" he asked.

"My maid," she replied.

The maid came into the room and took the stand. She was a bright young girl and had been in the señora's service for two years.

"Where, if you know, was the señora between one and two o'clock yesterday afternoon?" the general asked.

"In her room, sir."

"You are certain of that? Kindly remember that you are under oath!"

"I am absolutely certain, señor! The señora was suffering with neuralgia, and I was treating her."

"Did the señora leave her room during the night?"

"She has not left it for more than twenty-four hours, except to come here."

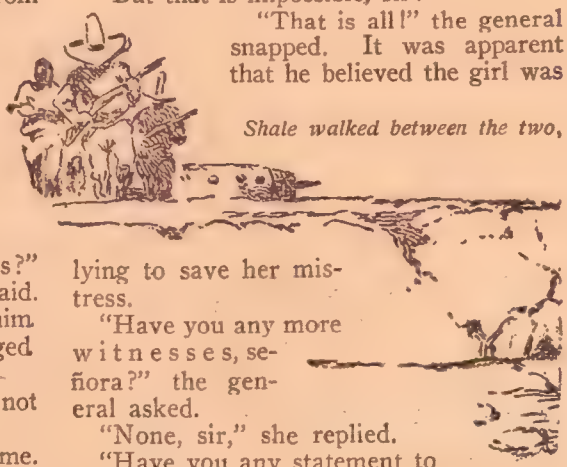
"You were awake all the night?"

"I was, sir. The señora was nervous. The firing in the plaza was dreadful, sir, and the colonel was on duty and could not be with the señora. I did not close my eyes all night, and the señora did not go to sleep until an early hour this morning."

"Señor Shale declares that he returned with the señora to the door of her room during the night."

"But that is impossible, sir!"

"That is all!" the general snapped. It was apparent that he believed the girl was



*Shale walked between the two,*

lying to save her mistress.

"Have you any more witnesses, señora?" the general asked.

"None, sir," she replied.

"Have you any statement to make?"

"I have," she replied, proudly. "I desire to say that I understand nothing of all this. I have been in my room since yesterday morning. I

was not in the plaza, I did not see Señor Shale or this sergeant last night, and I did not open a door to save their lives. I never talked to men and urged them to become rebels. I swear that I am loyal!"

"Did anybody visit you yesterday afternoon or last night in your apartment?"

"I saw no one except my maid. Colonel Martinez was with me for a few minutes early in the evening, then went back to his duties."

"What did you mean by telling that condemned rebel to speak the truth and tell all?" the general asked.

"I thought that he might say something that would give a clew to this mystery."

"You still deny your guilt?"

"I swear that I am innocent!" Her reply rang clear and true.

The general arose and faced the court. "Gentlemen, we will go into another room to deliberate," he announced. "Señora Martinez will be returned to her apartment and placed under close guard. Colonel Martinez will be put under arrest until the court-martial reports a finding."

*Torello leaning heavily against him*

He led the way from the room, and the other officers of the court-martial followed. Guards took the señora and the colonel away. The others remained behind to discuss the case.

The evidence was damaging enough, and it seemed to point to the señora's guilt. But there remained one important point—lack of motive. Señora Martinez had every reason to be loyal to the government. Her husband was slated for promotion, and the señora loved him. Why should such a woman disgrace her husband and family?

The battle in the town was about at an end. Here and there small groups of revolutionists were holding out, their backs against a wall, so to speak. But the firing was dying down, and the flames were at last under control. Rebellion had failed again, and law and order were about to be restored.

Almost an hour passed, and then the members of the court-martial entered the room again, slowly, their faces masks, and

the señora and her husband were summoned.

"The court has made a finding," the general said, in his deep voice. "The defendant has been declared guilty of treason!"

Señora Martinez seemed to be on the verge of collapse. She gave a cry and would have fallen, had not the guard quickly supported her. The colonel staggered back against the wall, but no words came from his lips. In an instant, the señora had crossed the room and had knelt before him.

"You will not believe them, Manuel!" she pleaded. "I swear that I am a loyal woman, that I have done nothing to bring this disgrace upon you! I have told the truth, Manuel! As you love me, say that you believe me!"

Colonel Martinez looked down at her. "I love you better than life," he said. "But how can I believe you in the face of all this evidence? Sergeant Torello would not lie, for he has served our family. Señor Shale would not lie; he tried to save you. That poor, ignorant deserter, doomed to die, would not lie, and in his ignorance he betrayed you while trying to save you."

She sprang to her feet. Her native pride came to her rescue for a moment now. Shale thought he never had seen a woman so beautiful as Señora Martinez at that moment.

"Manuel, you believe me guilty of this dastardly thing!" she cried. "Manuel, I swear——"

The colonel quickly placed a hand against her lips.

"It is no time to perjure yourself," he told her. "You have done enough already!"

"Manuel, you do not love me!" she said brokenly.

"I love you better than life, I said," was his reply.

"Then, Manuel, say that you do not believe these lies!"

He pointed across the room, where the regimental flags were stacked against the wall. "I am a soldier," he said, "from a race of soldiers. Need I say more?"

"Then you believe that I am guilty?"

He did not answer for a moment, as he fought to conquer his emotion.

"Yes!" he said, firmly, though it was difficult for him to speak the word.

She recoiled from him for an instant, as though he had struck her, and then went swiftly to his side again.

"Manuel!" she cried. "I swear that I am innocent. But death is nothing if I go to it knowing that I still have your love, that you do not believe these lies."

"How can they be lies?" the colonel asked. "I cannot but believe you guilty."

General Ambrosio stepped toward them.

"Señora Martinez, are you prepared to listen to the sentence of the court?" he asked.

"I am," she answered. She stood erect and faced him, her eyes burning into his.

"The sentence of the court is that you be shot to death to-day at sunset!" His voice was firm and clear.

"You will slay an innocent woman," she declared. She turned to her husband again. "Manuel, say that you believe I am innocent," she begged. "Death is nothing if you trust me."

"I cannot say so," he replied.

Again she would have fallen had not a guard supported her. Colonel Martinez did not extend an arm to save her. For the instant he was all soldier, and there was no heart in the man.

The general spoke again. "Because the case is so unusual," he said, "the members of the court are willing to grant a concession. The law of the army holds that every officer is responsible for each and every act of members of his family in garrison with him. We have no wish to execute a woman. But somebody must die to satisfy the law. Either the señora faces the firing squad at sunset, or Colonel Martinez takes her place."

"No, no!" the señora cried. "Neither of us is guilty! Manuel, say that you believe I am innocent!"

"I cannot but believe you guilty," the colonel said.

"Then you do not love me—have never loved me!"

Colonel Martinez turned swiftly and looked at her.

"I believe that you are guilty," he said with emotion. "I cannot but believe you a traitor to my country. But I still love you with my whole heart."

"Prove it, Manuel! Say you believe me."

"I will prove it!" he cried. He stepped past her and faced the general. "Sir," he said, "kindly have Señora Martinez conducted to her apartment. I will face your firing squad at sunset!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE TRAPDOOR AGAIN.

THERE was silence for a moment; then the officers in the room cheered. They were quick to realize the predicament and heroism of the colonel, a man for whom the rank and file had little love because of his stern discipline, but a man highly respected by his brother officers.

Señora Martinez suddenly seemed to comprehend the situation. Grasping her husband's arm, she sought to disuade him.

"No, no!" she cried. "I'll not permit it. I am innocent, Manuel. You shall not die in my place for a crime that I did not commit."

The colonel walked away from her and addressed himself to the general again.

"Sir, I am the head of my family," he said. "I issue orders concerning the members of that family. I ask that you make this ordeal easier for me by having the señora conducted immediately to her apartment."

Señora Martinez was led away immediately, weeping and protesting. The officers stepped forward one by one and grasped Martinez by the hand, before going about their duties.

"Colonel, this mystery is surely going to be explained," Martin Shale said. "There's something queer about all this. The señora has certainly been telling the truth."

"It is hard to think that my wife could be guilty of such a thing," Martinez replied, "but there is evidence which cannot be denied. I do not care to live with my name disgraced. I could not remain in the army, nor go into politics, and the future would hold nothing for me except the contempt of all honest men."

Shale would have said more, but the colonel motioned for him to be silent, and faced the general again.

"What are your orders, sir?" he asked.

"Martinez, you are a brave soldier and a loyal man," the general said. "I give you your liberty until the hour of execution. Should you escape, of course your wife would take your place before the firing squad."

"I have no intention of trying to escape, sir!" Martinez said, with a trace of anger in his voice. He saluted and left the room.

Martin Shale turned to the window again and looked across the plaza. There was firing in the distance.

"They are coming nearer," said the general, who had come to a stop at Shale's side.

"But your troops are driving them," Shale pointed out.

"It is unfortunate that they should be driven so near headquarters. I wish that I could get to the real bottom of this business. There are some peculiar things about this revolt. Señora Martinez may have incited it, but there were others prepared to take hold and try to make it a success. I'll have that condemned man in here again!"

He called an orderly and commanded that the man be brought, and soon the deserter was in the room.

"Life is a sweet thing," the general observed. He looked at the man, whose face was contorted with fear.

"Are you married?" the general asked.

"I have a wife and four children, sir."

"It is hard for a man to give up his life for the mistake of a moment, especially when he leaves loved ones behind him."

"It is, sir."

"All of us are prone to make mistakes," the general said, not unkindly. "Some are more costly than others. You made the worst mistake of all, when you turned traitor in time of war, for justice has swift action for traitors."

The man turned his face away, fighting to keep from betraying the emotion he felt.

"Do you want to live, to be able to return to your wife and family?" the general asked.

"If that were possible, sir," said the man eagerly.

"Perhaps it is possible, if you are willing to talk."

"What would you have me say, sir?"

"Tell me the names of the ringleaders in this affair. I know the chief rebels. I want the names of the persons who worked among my troops and tried to get them to mutiny and join the revolutionists."

"Sir?" the man gasped.

"Tell me everything, and you'll go free. You will be placed in some other regiment, this stain will be wiped away, and in time you may return to your family."

The condemned man looked up at him quickly, then went to the window.

"You see them fighting, sir?" he said. "Some of them are traitors, the same as I am. Would you have me be a traitor twice?"

"It is not treason to help conquer your country's enemies."

"I have made a mistake, sir, and I am ready to pay for it. I will not be a double traitor."

"Then you die at sunset, and your wife is a widow and your children fatherless."

"Yet I must do it," the man replied.

"You are a brave man, at any rate," the general declared. "You might have been of value."

"All that is over now, sir."

"For the last time, will you tell me what I wish to know?" the general demanded.

"I cannot, sir."

"Then this is the end," the general said.

He stepped aside to beckon to the guard. In that instant, the condemned man had sprung through the window, carrying glass and frame with him. Martin Shale gave a cry of surprise and rushed forward, as did the general and the guard also. The man struck upon his feet, staggered a moment, and then dashed into the open plaza.

"Get him!" the general cried.

A revolver exploded almost in Shale's ear as the guard fired at the fugitive. Still the man ran on, dodging from side to side, trying to reach a building where some of his comrades were holding out.

"This is a pretty business!" the general stormed. "He will arouse them again."

They could hear cheers as the man reached the building across the plaza. Some of the rebels rushed outside to aid him, beating off rurales who would have made a recapture. His escape seemed to renew the strength of the rebels. They assaulted the rurales and for a moment beat them back.

"He only delays matters for a few hours," the general said. "There can be but one end to a rebellion such as this."

He summoned his orderly, and through him several of the officers, and issued orders rapidly. More men left headquarters to join the fray in the plaza and the street. The firing in the distance increased. An orderly came to headquarters with the information that two bodies of rebels had managed to join each other and were putting up a stubborn fight.

Half an hour passed, during which Martin Shale remained in the officers' room, receiving scant attention from those who came and went. Then, remembering Torello, in a room on the floor above, he decided to go there and tell the sergeant the news. He found Torello sitting up and smoking a cigarette.

"It is not much of a wound, señor," he told Shale. "It is true that I lost some blood, but I could fight again now, if it were necessary."

Shale told him all that he knew.

"It goes to show, señor, that we never know whom to trust," Torello said. "Who would have thought that the señora could have been guilty of such treason?"

"I don't believe she is guilty!" Shale snapped. "I don't care how much evidence there is or how things look, either! She's not guilty, and that's all there is to it!"

"How can there be any doubt?" the sergeant asked. "Was she not seen and heard? Didn't I see her? Do you think that I would lie a woman's life away, señor'"

"I don't. But a man can be mistaken."

"Don't I know the señora well? Didn't I serve the colonel's family? I knew her before she was married to the colonel."

"I hate to see a man like Martinez die under such circumstances," Martin Shale said.

"It must be either the colonel or his wife."

"They may be saved yet."

"Little chance of that, señor," Torello assured him.

Suddenly they heard the patter of feet on the roof above. The sergeant got out of his chair quickly.

"It's probably some detail coming back to report," Shale said. "The chances are they couldn't get through the streets safely, so they came over the roofs."

"A detail, señor? Listen!" Torello said.

It was no detail—there were too many men for that. Their feet pattered back and forth across the roof.

"Did we lock the trapdoor?" the sergeant asked.

Shale did not reply, but started for the hall with the sergeant at his heels. The same thought had come to both of them—it might be that the rebels had outwitted the loyal troops and were now trying to enter the headquarters building.

They hurried along the hall and into the room where the trapdoor was in the ceiling. And suddenly they found themselves in the midst of a score of rebels. They were seized, hurled back against a wall, weapons were raised against them. But the man who had escaped and who led this detachment of rebels, saved their lives.

"Do not slay them!" he cried. "They will tell us what we want to know."

More men crowded down through the trap, until almost fifty were in that room under the roof. And there were less than fifty loyal men and officers on the floor below!

"Where is Señora Martinez?" the leader demanded.

Neither Shale nor the sergeant answered.

"Tell us!" he ordered. "We've come to rescue her."

Martin Shale felt his heart leap. If the señora could be rescued, and the colonel with her, they would be saved for the time being.

"I'll show you!" Shale said.

Torello whirled upon him. "Señor! You would help these traitors save another traitor?" he cried.

"I'm helping an innocent woman out of a mess!" Shale replied.

"But she is guilty!"

"Yes? I think that she's innocent," Shale replied. "And I'm thinking it mighty hard!"

Then, while Torello cursed and tried to fight the men who held him prisoner, Shale led the way down the hall to the door of the señora's room. The soldier on guard there was taken prisoner without a fight. The rebels guarded the stairs to prevent anybody coming up.

They opened the door and dashed into the señora's room, some half dozen men with Shale among them. She came from an adjoining room and stopped in the doorway to regard them.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"We have come to save you, señora!" the leader cried. "Hurry, for they may be upon us soon."

She pointed toward the door. "Go!" she ordered.

"We'll not leave you behind to die for us," the man said.

"You have no business here, señors!" she declared. "And I do not know you, sir, except that you helped lie my life away."

"You must come with us, señora! We'll not leave you here to die. The men will fight like demons when you are with them. We'll win yet!"

"I do not know you. I am a loyal woman!" she said.

The men at the top of the stairs began firing, for they had been discovered by those below. The leader whirled toward the señora.

"It is no time for argument," he said. "Seize her, and bring her along."

He dashed back into the hall to see how his men were getting along. Some of those in the room grasped the señora by the arms and compelled her to go to the door. Shale was at her side for an instant.

"Go with them, señora. There is a chance that everything may be explained later," he said.

Then he sped after the leader.

"Get Colonel Martinez," he suggested "If you don't they'll shoot him in place of his wife."

"We have no love for the colonel, señor. Let him die!

The screaming, fighting men pushed Shale backward as they retreated from the top of the stairs. He slipped into a side room and stood back against a wall. Señora Martinez had been hurried up through the trap. Sergeant Torello was still a prisoner. He turned his eyes away when Shale glanced at him and would not look at him again.

The rebels crowded into the room from the hall.

"What shall be done with these men?" one of them shouted to the leader.

"Release that sergeant," he replied. "He is a brave man and has done nothing special to bother us."

"He spied on us yesterday," another cried.

"In that case, take him with you."

"Why not execute him here?"

"There are worse things than quick death."

"And the other?"

The leader looked at Martin Shale.

"He defended the señora," the leader replied. "He was friendly toward her. Take him along and keep him prisoner until we learn what the señora wishes done with him. Do not let him be harmed."

They forced Shale and Torello toward the trap. The loyal men were swarming up the stairs, fighting to gain every step. Once the rebels sent a volley crashing down, and men fell and choked the path for others.

"They'll be after us!" a man shrieked.

The leader lifted a torch one of the men carried. It blazed and he threw it into a mass of stores in a corner of the room.

"Hold them a moment longer, and then retreat," he ordered. "If they come after us then, it will be through smoke and flame."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE DUEL.

SHALE and Torello were taken to the roof and forced across it and onto the building adjoining. From time to time, the loyal soldiers in the plaza and the streets fired, and the rebels replied in kind.

Finally those who led the way, Señora Martinez with them, opened another trap-door and entered a building, and the others hurried up to them. Some of the loyal troops had gained the roofs and were following. Smoke and flame poured from the headquarters building. There were neither men nor apparatus for fighting the fire, and it was evident that the entire row of buildings would be destroyed.

It was a little after noon when they entered the building. They trooped down a flight of steps, went through a passage, into a basement and from there into the basement of yet another building through a hole in the wall. They emerged into an alley, crossed the street adjoining, and entered a little plaza. There were no loyal soldiers in this section, for they were fighting in the opposite direction.

In time, the rebels entered another building with the señora, and Shale, and Torello. There they were greeted by more rebels who cheered when they found their leader back, and the señora with him.

"Now, señora, you are safe!" the leader said, bowing before her.

"Safe!" she cried. "The wife of a loyal officer safe in your hands?"

They laughed uproariously at that, as though at an excellent joke.

"At least you will not die at sunset," they told her. "And our work must go on now. Has the señora any suggestions to offer? We are listening to her."

"Suggestions about what?" she asked.

"About the fighting."

"I have nothing at all to do with the fighting," she declared. "I do not know you men. Do not insult me by intimating such a thing. If you have brought me here to kill me, do so, and have an end of it. This is worse than death; it is torture."

"Those are strange words, señora, to come from your lips," the leader said. "Did you not counsel us to this rebellion? Did you not promise that the arsenal would be thrown open for us? We have no ill feelings because that was not done, but can't you suggest some other way of helping us?"

"I never counseled you to rebellion, señor!" she declared. "I never spoke to you, nor saw you in my life, until this morning at the court-martial. Either you are insane, or are trying to make a jest of my helplessness."

"We have rescued you from death! You are free to lead us. Do we not love you for what you have already done for our cause?" he said fervently.

"I have done nothing for you," Señora Martinez declared.

"Why pretend, here, señora?" the leader asked her. "There are none here except friends. Or, if you think that there may be a spy here——" He paused and glanced around the room.

"I am not pretending," she replied. "You, too, must be making a mistake."

"Señora, did you not speak to us yesterday in the plaza? Did you not, last night, order us to spare the lives of these two men, the sergeant and the Americano, when we would have slain them?"

"I tell you that I know nothing of it," she said.

The leader smiled. "The señora perhaps has her reasons for speaking and acting as she does," he reflected. "We'll bother her no more at present. Make yourself comfortable, señora. Ask for anything that you desire."

*Suddenly, Shale and Torello found themselves surrounded by rebels.*

"Then I desire you to allow me to return to headquarters," was the quick reply.

"But headquarters is in ashes!"

"Then let me leave here alone. I will find the new headquarters. My husband will die at sunset unless I am there and take his place. He must not die for me."

"And you must not die to save him!" the leader cried. "We love you too much to allow you to do that."

"Then you'll not let me go?" she asked.

"You command us, señora, but we beg of you to do nothing like you suggest."

She arose and walked toward the door. "I am going to leave this house," she said, "and try to find somebody from headquarters. This so-called rescue of yours is but another stain on my husband's name."

"Is your love for your husband making you forsake us?" the leader demanded. "You should have considered such things before arousing us, señora."

"I tell you again that I had nothing to do with this rebellion!"

"Señora, you talked to us," he insisted. "You wore the same costume then that you are wearing at this minute. We know your voice, your appearance, know you well. Why pretend otherwise, then? I say that everybody here is a friend, unless it is these two men, the sergeant and the gringo. Shall I have them sent away?"

"They are both good friends of mine, though the sergeant believes ill of me," she replied.

"I beg you, señora, to go into the other room and rest. Perhaps the trial has shaken your nerves."

She started to refuse, but he motioned to some of the men, and they conducted her to an adjoining room.

"This affair has crazed her, but she will be all right after a rest," the leader declared. "She cannot escape from that room, for there is but the one door, and no low windows. The men in here can guard her. She is free, yet she is practically a prisoner."

Torello had been sitting in a corner, untied, but with men watching him closely. Now he got up and went slowly to the center of the room. There was a puzzled expression in his face.

"What Señora Martinez is, and what she has done, I do not know," Torello said. "I don't know whether she told you to spare me. But I am a loyal soldier, and do not consort with traitors except under protest. If there is a man of courage among you, give him a gun and let him fight me. Gun or knives! If I lose, well and good, for I can die but once. If I

win, you are to let me go. If I remain under the same roof with traitors, it shall not be while I am alive!"

The men commenced muttering angrily among themselves.

"We saved you because we thought that you were the señora's friend," the leader said.

"I am no friend to a traitor—man or woman!" said Torello proudly.

"In that case, we must take you at your word," said the leader. "You are in the way here, unless you are one of us. We thought perhaps you were of some value to the señora, and through her to us, by being at headquarters."

"You took me for a disloyal man!" Torello cried. "If I had a weapon, and you stood before me, I'd prove my loyalty quick enough!"

The leader's eyes flashed fire. "So be it!" he said. "If you are so eager to fight, you shall!"

The other rebels crowded forward, telling their leader that his life was too valuable to be risked in a personal encounter, begging for permission to knife Torello and have an end of it.

"I, alone, shall fight him!" the leader cried. "Let us go into the yard!"

He led the way, leaving two men behind to guard Señora Martinez. Martin Shale was carried along with them. Torello and the leader stripped to their waists and selected knives.

"A traitor has no honor," Torello said. "So, even if I win, I lose, for your men will kill me. Yet I hope to win, that there may be one traitor the less."

The leader called to his men. "If this soldier slays or wounds me, he is to go free!" he commanded. "You understand?"

Then their knives met.

They were about evenly matched, and it was a pretty battle. Back and forth they fought, across the uneven ground, breathing heavily, but not speaking.

And then Torello began to tire, for his wound had started bleeding again and he was growing weaker. The rebel seemed to gain renewed strength. Still Torello fought.

The leader of the rebels forced him backward, step by step. Martin Shale feared for the sergeant, and thought that it would soon be over. The rebel leader thrust, and Torello was scarcely able to turn the blade aside; he staggered as he recovered. The sergeant was on the defensive now, fighting for his life with all his strength.

"Do you give up?" the rebel leader cried.

Torello uttered an oath. "I give up to no traitor!" he said.

The rebel's face went black with rage, and he fought with renewed ardor. The blades flashed swiftly. Martin Shale started to turn away, not wishing to see the end of it.

Then suddenly the rebels burst into cheers, and Shale heard them running. He turned his head quickly, just in time to see a woman separate the duelists, in time to see her confront them angrily, her eyes flashing, just in time to see Torello stagger back and sink to the ground too weak to defend himself, and to see the rebel leader turn aside.

The woman was Señora Martinez.

"Men!" she cried. "You fight duels while your comrades are dying! To the streets, all of you! Have I thrown away everything in life to be disobeyed like this?"

"Señora!" the men were cheering.

"How came you here, señora?" the leader demanded.

"I am here, and that is enough. To the streets—all of you! They are fighting again at the end of the plaza, and down by the arsenal. There is a chance you may yet win the arsenal unless the loyal soldiers blow it up. To the streets! I'll remain here!"

"To the streets, to the streets!" they cried.

Like madmen they rushed for weapons, and hurried across the little courtyard to the alley. The señora remained behind with Torello and Martin Shale.

So the mask had fallen! She was a traitor, after all! But how had she learned of the battle down by the arsenal, Shale wondered. And how did it happen that the guard had allowed her to leave the room and go into the courtyard?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE REBEL CHIEF.

THE señora stood in the center of the courtyard, beside an old, unused fountain, and looked after the rebels as they rushed toward the street. Martin Shale glanced at her and then hastened to To-

rello. The sergeant had no serious fresh wounds; he was only exhausted because of his long encounter.

It was but the work of a moment for Shale to help Torello to his feet again and lead him near the wall where there was a patch of shade. There he sat on a bench, leaning forward, resting his head on his hands. The señora crossed the yard and stood before him.

"I think that I have saved your friend's life for the second time," she said to Shale.

Torello lifted his head. "And for the second time, señora, I am compelled to say that I wish I had somebody else to thank," he said.

She frowned a little, but did not turn away. "I appreciate loyalty," she said. "You are a good soldier."

"You appreciate loyalty, señora? That is a queer speech to come from the lips of a traitor."

"We'll not talk of that at present," she said.

Shale stepped closer to her. "Are you brave enough," he asked, "to tell us the truth of this affair? Last night you saved our lives from the rebels, and a few hours later you declared before the court-martial that you had not. Then, when you were brought here a short time ago you told the rebels that you did not know them or anything about their affairs. Yet now you take command of them and send them into the streets to fight. What's a man to think?"

"You say that a short time ago I declared I did not know them or anything about their affairs?" she asked.

"You certainly did, señora!" Shale told her. "And they put you in a room under guard. I suppose you escaped the guard in some manner. How did you learn of the fighting down by the arsenal?"

There was a strange expression on her face. "What you say is of much interest to me," she said.

"Senora, we do not understand," Shale said.

"But I do, and that is enough," she said enigmatically. "Sometimes peculiar things happen in this world. What are you and this sergeant doing here?"

"Well, good heavens!" Shale cried. "Don't you remember that they brought us here when they rescued you from headquarters?"

"I did not notice."

"That's strange," said Shale, puzzled.

"I do not think that you are safe here," she went on.

"Yes? It isn't safe in any particular spot in the town of Quebrada," Shale replied. "But at least you are safe now, and with your friends. And your husband will die before a firing squad at sunset because of what you've done."

"You say that my husband——" Suddenly she ceased speaking as though in confusion. Shale looked at her narrowly. He wondered what on earth was the matter with the woman. Had the fighting and confusion robbed her of her wits?

"Wait here!" she commanded. She whirled around and went quickly into the building.

Shale helped Torello to the fountain, where there was a bit of stagnant water, and bathed his face. They could hear the noise of the battle in the streets.

"Torello, what's our game now?" Shale asked.

"We are going to leave here and try to reach headquarters, señor," the sergeant replied.

"But headquarters is in ruins," Shale said.

"We can at least find some loyal troops, señor."

"But the streets——" Shale began.

"The streets are as safe for us as the camp of the rebels," the sergeant pointed out. "It is better for me to die loyal than to live, through the mercy of traitors. You, of course, are an American. This is not your fight, and it is your own affair what you do."

"You insist on prowling through the streets?" Shale asked.

"I do!"

"Then I'm going right along with you, hombre. I might be lonesome if I stayed here," was Shale's unhesitating reply.

They clasped hands, grinned, and Shale led the way toward the gate of the courtyard. But, as they reached it, they heard a cry behind them, and turned to find the señora running after them.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"Into the streets," Torello replied. "We are going to fight our way to the new headquarters."

"You are going to desert me? Where are the rebels?"

Shale looked at her in astonishment. "Why, you ordered them to go into the

streets and fight a few minutes ago," he said. "And we're sure and certain not deserting you when we leave you with your friends."

"I do not understand," she said. "They made me a prisoner in a room. Later, I heard them leave the adjoining apartment, and I opened the door and found myself free. Take me back with you! I must get back, or my husband——"

"Will surely die in your place," Shale finished for her.

"Yes," the señora said. "And for a fault that neither of us committed.

"Señora, we'll help you to reach headquarters," Shale told her. "But you understand that we take you back there at your own request. I was for believing you innocent until a few minutes ago. But I heard you order those men to go into the street and fight."

"I scarcely can expect you to believe in my innocence, Señor Shale, when my own husband does not," she said. "Please get me to the new headquarters, if you can."

Torello uttered an exclamation of disgust and pulled the gate open. They passed through it and started down the alley toward the street, keeping close to the buildings. The sound of firing reached their ears. There was a small-sized battle raging, down near the adobe arsenal.

Martin Shale had reached the conclusion that Señora Martinez was insane. Otherwise, how did it happen that she contradicted herself so frequently? One moment she posed as a loyal woman, the next, she took command of the rebels.

"We are in for trouble," Torello announced, as they came to a corner and started down a side street.

Several blocks ahead was a group of men, and they could not tell whether they were rebels or loyal. But, as they hurried on, another group of men dashed into the street from a building and attacked the first. Almost before they realized it, the fugitives were at the battle's edge.

Then wild cries went up from another of the buildings—the men there were cheering the señora. They rushed out and crowded around her, and around Torello and Shale.

"You are in danger, señora!" they were crying at her.

They made a protective square about her and so forced their way through the loyal troops. Torello and Shale were carried along in the rush. More loyal troops poured from a side street, and Shale saw Colonel Martinez at their head. Here was a pretty circumstance—a man forced to lead a fight against his own wife.

Martinez saw his wife, and an expression of mingled rage and pain came into his face, and it was difficult to tell which emotion predominated. He issued orders in a voice of thunder. The loyal troops he commanded forced the rebels back, the square that protected the señora broke, and Torello and Shale were hurled to one side against a building as the rout went by in headlong haste.

In another instant, the loyal troops had hemmed them in and were congratulating the sergeant and the American; they believed that they had rescued them. But Shale was watching Colonel Martinez, who thrust his way through the throng until he reached the señora's side.

"So the mask has fallen!" he cried. "There is no more deception. Not only are you a traitor, but also you urge the rebels with your very presence. Where in all the world is there another woman as vile as you? It is an act of justice to take the life of such as you!"

Shale saw his revolver in his hand, heard half a dozen men shout at him. The señora cringed against the wall, her big eyes upon her husband.

"Manuel!" she cried.

His arm dropped to his side. "I can't!" he said brokenly.

The troops closed in again, and the señora was once more a prisoner, under guard. Shale and Torello were also taken along.

The new headquarters were but a short distance away. But short distances were long distances that day in the town of Quebrada, for they were not to come to headquarters without more trouble. The rebels were not content to allow the señora to face death at sunset.

At the next corner, the loyal troops were attacked again and driven into the plaza. There they were hemmed in, with rebels on every side. Step by step, they retreated to the side street, and when they came to it, flesh and blood could not endure the strain longer, and the loyal troops broke and fled.

The rebels had the señora in their midst again in a moment. Sergeant Torello had retreated with the loyal soldiers, but Mar-

tin Shale remained behind, unable to pass through the mob.

Most of the rebels left in pursuit of the loyal troops, but those who remained behind conducted the party back across the square.

"Cannot we escape them?" the señora whispered to Shale.

"You want to escape from your friends?" he asked.

"I want to reach the headquarters," she replied.

"The headquarters we are due to reach are those of the rebels," Shale told her. "Your friends seem to be getting the best of it. They'll probably loot the town tomorrow, and give you a share of what they get."

"You believe me guilty, then?" she asked. "I believe that this is driving me mad. What have I ever done that my life should end in this misery?"

"I'm not your judge, señora," Shale said.

"Where are they taking us?"

Shale asked the man nearest him.

"To the arsenal," the man said.

"You hold the arsenal?" asked Shale in surprise.

"We have held it for the last two hours," the rebel replied. "The commander is there now."

"But I thought that this woman commanded you," Shale said.

"She is our good angel, but we have a soldier in command, señor," was the reply. "An officer who deserted the loyal troops this morning. He is a wise man—he saw which way the battle was going."

"Who is he?" Shale asked.

"Wait until you are taken before him, and you'll learn. I do not know whether I should tell you his name until you are safe in the arsenal."

They hurried on through the streets strewn with débris. At a corner, they seized a cart, placed the señora in it, and urged the pony to its best speed. They reached the bottom of the small hill which the arsenal crowned, and made their way up the winding road slowly.

They could look back and see the entire town now. To the north, the buildings were burning. Down in the plaza, men fought furiously. Guns blazed.

They entered the arsenal building and went along a winding corridor to the officers' quarters. The señora and Shale were taken to a large room and compelled to sit down. The men, with the exception of a few, departed. One of those who remained approached Shale.

"The commander wants to see you, Americano," he said. "He will be here soon."

"You say that your commander is an officer who deserted the army to-day?" Shale asked.

"Yes."

"Who is he? Perhaps I know him."

"He is coming," the man replied.

Steps were heard in the hall outside; then the door was thrown open. The señora gave a little cry of astonishment, and Martin Shale sprang out of his chair.

The man standing before them, the commander of the rebel forces and of the arsenal, this officer who had deserted the army to head a treasonable cause, was Captain Gomez, the renegade who had sold his courage for gold.

Whether the señora was safe in the man's hands, Shale did not know. But Shale did know that Captain Gomez hated him, and that he was completely in the enemy's power.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A CRUEL ULTIMATUM.

CAPTAIN GOMEZ gave a smile that was more an evil smirk than anything else. He walked forward and sat down at the end of a table, facing Shale and the señora.

"You had a little trouble down in the streets?" he asked insolently.

"We were right in the thick of it," Shale replied.

"You were trying to escape, were you not?"

"From whom?" Shale asked.

"From those you call rebels."

"We were left alone in a courtyard, and went out into the streets," Shale replied. "We ran smack into a street brawl, and your men protected the señora and me."

"There was a sergeant of rurales with you, Torello by name, the same who was with you when the señora saved your lives last night?" questioned the chief.

"He was with us when we left that courtyard. He went away with the loyal troops."

"And you decided to remain with my men and the señora?" Gomez asked.

"I had no choice," Shale informed him.

"And now that you are here, what am I going to do with you?" said Gomez tantalizingly. "Are you friendly toward the federals or toward my men?"

At that, Shale exploded. "I am an American citizen here in the town of Quebrada on business," he said angrily. "I don't take sides in any scrap that doesn't concern me directly."

"All that is true," said Gomez. "Yet circumstances have forced you into the midst of things, and we have to deal with you in some manner."

"That is for you to decide, since you seem to be in power here," Shale said.

"What treatment do you expect?" asked Gomez, curiously.

"From you? I expect to die at sunset," Shale replied, instantly.

"You have keen instinct," Gomez replied, laughing lightly. "But why make it sunset, señor? It is only a little past the middle of the day; sunset is at least four hours away, and down in the streets men are dying by scores, before sunset. It is not necessary that everybody die at that particular hour. That is an hour reserved for the death of spies."

"And traitors!" Martin Shale added.

The face of Gomez suddenly grew dark. "Careful, señor!" he warned. "You said but a moment ago that you took no side in this quarrel."

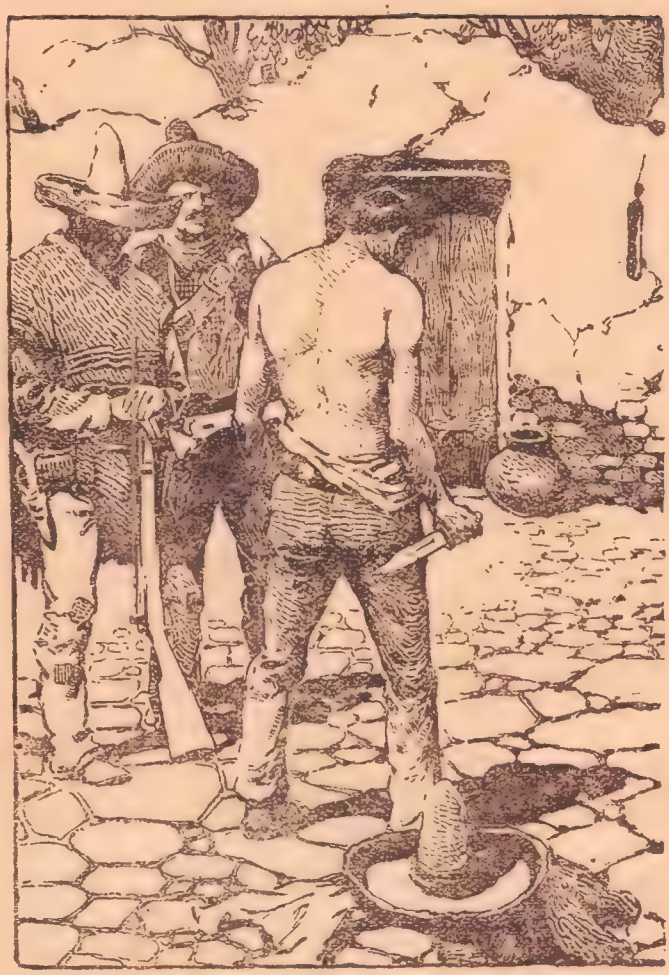
"A traitor is a traitor, whether I'm concerned in the business or not!"

"You expect to die, then. And the señora?"

"The señora is friendly to your cause, I reckon."

"And what have you to say, señora?" the captain asked.

She looked up at him now for the first time. "Only this, that I have had no share in this affair," she said. "I am innocent of any treason. I ask you to treat me as a loyal woman, no matter what the cost!"



*"A traitor has no honor," Torello said, "so*

"I suppose you would speak to the men in the same manner?" the captain asked, sneering. "How do you expect to gain anything by pretending loyalty here in our camp? Of course, it was all right at headquarters, when you were being tried for your life."

"I say the same to every one," she declared.

Captain Gomez summoned some of his men. "Take the señora to one of the rooms and guard her well," he ordered.

They took her away. Shale was alone with Gomez and an orderly.

"Shale, you and I have had trouble several times," Gomez said. "You do not like me, and I dislike you with all my heart."

"It started when I wouldn't help you rob

*even if I win, I lose, for your men will kill me."*

the government when I was selling beef to you," Shale reminded him.

"But I am sportsman enough not to take an unfair advantage," Gomez continued, as though he had not heard. "I do not intend to use my present power against you. I am going to give you a chance for your life."

"Yes?" Shale said.

"We have, here in the arsenal, a prisoner—an American girl. Her name is Elizabeth Hemton. Perhaps you know her."

Shale sprang from his chair, a cry of rage coming from him. The orderly covered him with a weapon.

"Do not attempt violence, please," Gomez said. "You know the young lady?"

"I do!" Shale said. "I came to Quebrada to escort her home. How does she happen to be here? What have you dared to do?"

"Oh, I have done nothing!" Gomez said. "She was with a party, seeing the sights of the village, when the rebellion broke out. She was detained by my men because it was dangerous in the streets. The remainder of the party escaped."

"A thin story!" Shale cried.

"But a true one, señor!" the captain insisted. "You are interested in this Miss Hemton, are you not?"

"That's none of your business!" said Shale hotly.

"But it is necessary to speak of it at this time, señor. I understand that she is your promised wife."

"Suppose that's true?"

"If it is true, you will perhaps pay strict attention to what I am going to tell you," Gomez said. "It is really fortunate for our cause that we have her here. After I have finished talking to you, I'll allow you to see her. I am going to give you a chance to rescue Miss Hemton also. The fair señorita will appreciate you the more."

"Give me a gun and I can do both, and settle with you also!" Shale cried.

"Softly, softly!" Captain Gomez purred. "I have no wish to fight you. That would not suit my purpose, even were I to win and slay you. Do you know where headquarters are now, since the old ones were burned?"

"I heard that information in the street during the last fight," Shale answered.

"You think that you could locate the place?"

"Perhaps."

"And do you think that you could find Colonel Martinez there?"

"I saw the colonel fighting in the street. He may be dead by now," Shale said.

"However, we are not sure of it," Gomez remarked. "Here is your task, then; leave here and go to headquarters, or find

Colonel Martinez wherever he may be. He is to be decoyed here, or carried here by force—I care not how, so long as he is brought before me a prisoner."

"What do you want with him?" Shale asked.

"That is my business, señor, allow me to point out," said Gomez stiffly. "Will you do as I ask?"

"I refuse to play any part in this affair," replied Shale. "I'm a neutral."

"Perhaps you will change your mind, señor, when you remember that Miss Elizabeth Hemton is in my hands."

"What do you mean?" Shale cried.

"I mean that you'll do as I say. I hold Miss Hemton as a hostage. When you return with Colonel Martinez, I hand her over to you unharmed, give you both safe conduct out of town, and you can take her to her home in safety."

"Suppose I refuse?" said Shale after a moment's hesitation.

"Ah! Then Miss Hemton will die at sunset, standing beside you, and with the knowledge that you could have saved her but would not," was the cruel ultimatum.

"Why, you——" Shale began.

"Careful!" Captain Gomez warned. "Do as I say, or you and your promised wife die at sunset before a firing squad. Meanwhile, I'll get Martinez by some other means."

"But how could I get Martinez here?" Shale demanded. "If he is still alive, he is fighting with his men, or else is a prisoner at headquarters, doomed to die tonight."

"It matters not to me," Gomez replied. "You are to do it, some way. Perhaps my men will help you, if you call upon them for aid and say that it is my orders."

"And if I try and fail?"

"Miss Hemton dies at sunset, unless you have returned by that time with Colonel Martinez!"

"There is not one chance in a hundred," said Shale, sadly.

"But perhaps that one chance is better than no chance at all, señor. You'll be away from here and able to escape, even if you do not rescue your lady by capturing the colonel."

"You think I'd leave her here to die without making an effort to save her?" asked Shale, savagely.

"I don't think so. You will do your best, señor. Will you do as I say?"

Shale hesitated for only a moment. "I am forced to do as you say," he replied.

"Good, señor!" Gomez cried. "I suppose you want to see Miss Hemton now? It will be better, for then you will have an incentive that will make for success."

He turned to the orderly.

"Bring the American señorita here!" he orderd.

Five minutes passed, and then steps were heard in the corridor, again, and Elizabeth Hemton entered the room. Another moment, and Martin Shale held her in his arms.

"You have come to save me, Martin?" she asked.

"I've come to try, Betty," he replied. "But I've got to do something for the captain before he'll let me take you away."

"And what is that?"

"I can't tell you now," he said. "Just be brave, and I'll have you free as soon as I can."

"What is it you have to do?" she demanded again.

"Just go down into the town and find a man, and bring him here," Shale said.

"What will it mean to him, if he is brought here?"

Shale faced Gomez. "What will it mean, captain?" he asked.

"It will not mean death," the captain answered. "But I am going to torture him, as he has tortured me and mine. Enough of this? Do as I have said, señor!"

"Do not do it, Martin!" the girl cried. "It is better for us to remain here as prisoners until the fighting is over."

"You do not understand," Shale said. "They are holding you as a hostage. I must locate this man and bring him here, for, if I do not——" he hesitated, loath to tell the rest.

"Yes?" she questioned.

"If he does not do what I ask," said Captain Gomez, "you die at sunset, Miss Hemton!"

"Oh!" she cried. "Why do you want to kill me? What have I done?"

"Nothing, señorita! You are but a puppet, in time of war, a time when men take advantage of every incident to further their own ends."

Shale embraced her, and then the soldiers took her back into the corridor. Shale whirled to face Gomez.

"I'm ready!" he snapped. "I'm forced to depend on your word."

"I have spoken truly," the captain replied. "If you succeed, you shall have freedom and an escort out of the town. I'll wait until sunset. Are you ready to go?"

"I am ready."

He sent the orderly for an officer.

"Cease firing for the moment," he ordered. "I am sending this man down into the town, and do not want him slain by our own guns. Hold fire until further orders."

They waited for a few minutes, until the guns stopped barking.

"Go now," Gomez said. "I hope that you succeed. I have little desire to send an innocent girl to a death that she does not merit. Follow the road down the hill. I'll send a squad of men with you, and you may requisition as many more as you please from those you meet in the streets."

Gomez led the way through the dark corridors to the gate. There he selected a squad of men and bade them obey Shale's orders, as long as they were in favor of the rebellion and had to do with the capture of Colonel Martinez.

Then Shale started down the hill at a good pace, the men straggling along behind him, according to orders. And in the arsenal behind him, he left the girl he loved, sentenced to be shot at sunset unless he accomplished his mission.

## CHAPTER X.

### WOMAN OR DEVIL?

THE street fighting had drifted toward the north, when they came to the town, and they had difficulty in making their way through the streets and across the squares. On the way, they picked up two more squads of men, and when they came to the end of the plaza, in the center of the town, Martin Shale had quite a company behind him.

Shale was trying to comprehend the situation. He was only a few miles south of the line, on the other side of which were Uncle Sam's broad acres, and peaceful ranches. Yet here he was in the midst of war, with all the elements of drama and tragedy around him. And Elizabeth Hemton was in the midst of it, too, and in grave danger.

Some of the men they had picked up knew where the new headquarters of the loyal troops were located. They turned into a main street to make their way toward the place; and there they met with the first resistance.

The rebels made a good stand, and others near by ran to their assistance. They were forced to take to the roofs, however, and for half an hour fought there, the rurales pouring volleys into them.

Finally they descended, and gained a back street, and approached the headquarters again, this time from the rear. But as they entered the square, they found a company of loyal men ready for them, with Colonel Martinez at their head.

Shale informed the men of his mission that they were to capture the colonel, and that he was to be returned to the arsenal unharmed. They went into the fray with cheers, proud of their minor victories, believing themselves invincible. Shale remained behind as the clash came, determined to take no more part than was absolutely necessary.

But, after a time, he found himself in the midst of the fighting, with hand-to-hand conflicts raging on every side. Somebody pressed a revolver into his hand.

"You have no weapon, señor. Here is one," the man said.

Slowly the rebels were driven back, and Martin Shale went with them. This did not suit his purpose. It was Colonel Martinez he was after, and if the rebels were defeated, it was Shale's plan to remain with the loyal troops. So he tried to reach the side of the nearest building and slip away from the rebels.

But he found that task not easy. The rebels thought that he had been wounded, or was fatigued, and they carried him along with them as they rushed into a side street and sought to make a stand. The loyal troops followed, Colonel Martinez urging them on.

For another half hour the rebels stood off their foes. The afternoon was speeding; it was less than three hours until sunset, and Shale's mission was not accomplished. The loyal troops began to have their way again. The rebels broke and fled, carrying Shale along with them. They turned a corner, and stopped, appalled.

In the center of the street stood Señora Martinez, scorn showing in her face.

"At them, you curs!" she cried. "Back! Drive them back, and capture the colonel!"

"Señora! Señora!" they shouted.

And they went back into the fray like demons, rushing the loyal troops like men seeking death. They drove them back down the side street and to the edge of the plaza; and there the loyal troops made another stand, and the battle was on again.

The señora had stepped inside a doorway, and Shale found himself within a few feet of her.

"You are fighting with the rebels," she said.

"You saw me," he answered.

She put out her hand. "Thanks, my friend!"

"I beg your pardon," Shale said, "but I don't want to shake hands with you."

"I do not understand."

"I reckon that you understand enough to know my reasons. Did they let you come from the arsenal to follow me and see that I didn't betray the rebels?"

"Now I am quite sure that I don't understand," she said, apparently puzzled.

"They took you away just before they sent me down into the town to capture your husband," Shale told her. "Now, I suppose, you are spying on me, to see that I do my work right."

"Did they send you to take the colonel a prisoner? I did not know," she said.

"Then why are you here?" asked Shale.

"I wished to see how things were coming along," she answered. "I just came from the other side of town. They are fighting in the ruins over there."

"How did you make the trip in such a short time?" he asked.

She appeared confused. "Is it not enough that I am here?" she said finally.

"You wanted to see your husband captured, I suppose," said Shale, scornfully. "Haven't you any heart at all?"

"Not for Colonel Martinez!" she declared.

"Only this morning you begged him to say that he loved you. You refused to let him die in your place."

"Did I?" she asked, laughing at him.

"Are you a woman, or a devil?" Shale cried, bewildered.

"I am a woman," she replied, "and I have a heart. That is why I am mixed up in this business. You'll understand later."

"You want your husband to be captured, and be slain at the arsenal?"

"Oh, he will not be slain!" she said. "There is an old score to settle with Colonel Martinez."

"How can you change so quickly?" Shale asked. "This morning at the court-martial, I would have sworn that you loved him."

"And now you know how deeply I hate him!" she said.

Shale glanced down the street. The battle still raged, and neither side appeared to be gaining an advantage. The time was passing rapidly. Shale's mission was nearing an end. Was he to save the girl he loved, or let her die because of his failure?

Shale started off down the street.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"To join the fight," Shale said. "I'm forced into it, but it is necessary."

"You will try to take the colonel prisoner?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes," he answered shortly.

"I hope that you succeed," she said.

Shale ran toward the rebel band. The woman was not far behind him. When the men saw her, they renewed their struggle, urging one another on.

But a fresh company of loyal troops came upon them from the rear. There was no time to seek cover, no time even to take to the roofs. Shale beheld a maze of men, fighting hand to hand, saw men fall at his feet, saw the señora try to rush past some of them to escape, and, almost before he realized it, the loyal troops had conquered.

Shale saw the man he had been sent to capture, walking toward him. The señora reeled back against a wall, clutching at her breast as though her breathing hurt her. The colonel stopped before her.

"This time——" he began, and raised the revolver in his hand.

But before he could discharge the weapon, it was knocked from his grasp, and Shale heard the voice of General Ambrosio.

"Stop!" the general commanded. "There shall be no murder. Take them to headquarters!"

"Both?" asked an aid.

"Yes," the general replied. "The woman is already condemned, and the man will be soon."

"What do you mean by that?" Shale cried.

"You are a leader of rebels," the general said. "I have had reports concerning you. When they invaded the old head-

quarters, they rescued the señora and you. You were taken to their camp and were there treated with every respect. You led this band from the arsenal and through the city. Foreigner or not, American or not, to me you are a rebel and shall be dealt with accordingly."

"There are some explanations," Shale said.

"You'll have a chance to make them, señor," the general replied. "They will have to be good ones."

He turned away, and Martin Shale was led down the street, a prisoner. Just ahead of him, two men guarded the señora closely. They were not long in reaching the new headquarters, where the señora was led away to one room while Shale was taken to another and a guard placed over him.

Shale was in torment. Two hours until sunset, and his mission had failed, and the girl he loved lay waiting for death! Moreover, it was likely that he would be before a court-martial himself in a short time.

Somebody threw open the door, and Shale glanced up. The newcomer was Sergeant Torello. Shale sprang to his feet and thrust out his hand, but Torello turned away.

"Aren't you going to shake hands?" Shale asked.

"You are a rebel, señor!"

"Let me tell you this," Shale cried, facing him. "I may die before a squad, but you shall know the truth and judge me for yourself. Would you like to know why I was with the rebels?"

"It does not interest me, señor," Torello said. "Come! The court-martial is waiting."

Shale said nothing as he was conducted down the stairs and to the room set aside for the court. He sat down like a man dazed, and listened while they gave testimony against him. After a time he heard the general's voice: "Have you witnesses, señor? Have you anything to say?"

Shale looked up at the general, and then at Colonel Martinez, and the other officers and soldiers in the room.

"I haven't any witnesses, but I've got plenty to say," Shale replied. "I've always believed in Señora Martinez' innocence. I was on the top floor at the old headquarters when the rebels entered. They offered to rescue the señora, and she told them that she did not know them. But they carried her away with them, and took me and Sergeant Torello also."

"We know of that, señor," the general said.

"We were taken to their camp, and there Señora Martinez once more denied she had anything to do with them. And a few minutes later she seemed to change her disposition, and sent them into the streets to fight. I tried to escape with Torello. Again we met the señora. Torello joined some loyal troops, but the señora and I were taken to the arsenal. There we met the leader of the rebels—the real leader—Captain Gomez!"

"Gomez!" they cried in astonishment.

"Yes. He's turned rebel and is in command at the arsenal."

"Is there no one to be trusted?" the general cried.

"Captain Gomez sent the señora to a room and detained me. He told me that Miss Elizabeth Hemton, the young lady I am engaged to marry, was his prisoner. He told me to come down into the city and capture Colonel Martinez and return him to the arsenal. If I did that I was to have an escort out of town with Miss Hemton. If I failed, she was to be shot at sunset. That's why I turned rebel. And I've failed! But I did not lead the rebels. I never fired a shot."

"Why does Captain Gomez wish to capture the colonel?" the general asked.

"I don't know. He says he doesn't want to kill him," Shale reported. "He said that he wants to torture him, as Colonel Martinez has tortured him and his."

"What does the man mean?" Martinez cried.

"I don't know, but those were his words."

"You say that you left the señora at the arsenal—yet she is here," the general pointed out.

"I met her again in the street, during the fighting," Shale said. "She had followed me, she said, to see that I really tried to capture the colonel."

"Yet this morning she was ready to die for him," the general said.

"And now she would be pleased if he were sent a prisoner to Gomez," Shale said.

"There is some mystery about this," the general declared. "We are in a perfect maze of intrigue and lies. Señor Shale, in reality you are guilty of being a rebel. But if things are as you say, I do not see

what any man could do, other than what you attempted. Your act merits death, but there may be some other way."

"What is the other way? How can I save Miss Hemton and myself?" Shale cried.

"I do not say that you can save yourself and the lady, but there is a chance," said the general. "You started on one desperate mission and failed. Perhaps you would succeed better on a second."

"Tell me what you mean."

"You tell me that Miss Hemton is being held until you return Colonel Martinez to the arsenal. You want to save her and yourself. Señora Martinez is now in our hands again. She shall die at sunset, and I will not allow her husband to take her place before the firing squad. Yet he may wipe out the stain on his name by doing a last service."

"Name the service, my general!" Martinez cried.

"Colonel Martinez, you are to leave here with Señor Shale, and allow Señor Shale to take you to the fortress as a prisoner. You will have a revolver beneath your blouse. When you come face to face with Captain Gomez, you'll know what to do—in the name of your country!"

"I'll know!" Martinez cried.

"You are to give Shale a chance to escape with Miss Hemton first. If Señor Shale offers to play you false, if he shows that he has been lying and is a rebel at heart, kill him!"

Then he turned to Shale.

"You are to go with the colonel under those conditions, señor," he explained to him.

"You are giving me a chance to do exactly what I was sent to do," Shale said.

"I am, señor. I want to save Miss Hemton, whom I know and respect. I want to save you, if you have been telling the truth. But above everything, I want to accomplish the death of Captain Gomez! In spite of his villainy, he is a good soldier. If he succeeds here, the rebellion will grow under his leadership."

"I understand," Shale said. "But the colonel can't hope to escape."

"The colonel is a soldier. If he dies, having slain Gomez, the rebel leader, his name will be cleared. If, instead, he manages to escape, after accomplishing his duty, he can begin life anew."

Colonel Martinez walked toward his commander. "I thank you, sir, for this chance," he said.

"You had best hurry. It is less than two hours to sunset," the general pointed out.

"Let me see my wife once more," the colonel begged.

"Here, in our presence only," the general replied. "Orderly, have Señora Martinez brought here."

## CHAPTER XI.

### HALF AN HOUR BEFORE SUNSET.

THEY awaited her coming, Colonel Martinez standing in the center of the room with the general, the rest by the windows. She entered with the orderly, the guard behind her, her head held high a proud look in her face.

"Well, señores?" she said. "Have you thought of some new cruelty?"

"You are to die at sunset, as you have been warned, señora," the general said. "I have granted you this last interview with your husband because he is about to set out on a perilous mission and may never see you alive again."

"I thought that my husband was to be allowed to die in my place," she said, her eyes suddenly like flint.

"It is probable," the general said, "that Colonel Martinez will die, and soon, but I prefer to have him meet death while removing from earth one of our nation's enemies."

"What is he to do?" she asked.

"If it will interest you, señora, he is being sent to the arsenal in the guise of a prisoner. Once there, he is to take the life of Captain Gomez, the traitor!"

The cynical smile left her lips, and she staggered forward with a little cry. "No! You shall not!" she said. "Do not send him there to do such a thing!"

"Why not, señora?"

"You must not! You shall not! You do not realize what you are doing!" And she began to weep.

Colonel Martinez stepped nearer her. "Señora," he asked, "are you weeping for Captain Gomez, or for me?"

She turned upon him like a tigress. "Who are you, that I should weep for you?" she cried. "What have you and yours ever done but heap curses on me?"

"Señora, you are insane!" the colonel cried.

"Weep for you! I hate you!" she screamed.

Then she whirled upon the general again. "You shall not send him to do this thing!" she cried. "You do not know what it means!"

"I certainly do not pretend to understand what you mean by these words and actions, señora," the general said. "But Colonel Martinez certainly goes upon this mission. If you have anything to say to him, say it now, for you, also, die within two hours."

"You mean that Señora Martinez dies," she replied. "I am not Señora Martinez!"

The colonel addressed her again. "The hour of a last parting is no time for a quarrel," he said, softly. "Do not deny that I am your husband. Let us face death as we should, with forgiveness in our hearts. For the sorrow, and shame, and misery, you have caused me, I freely forgive you. Say that you forgive me for anything that I may have done. This morning you begged me to take you in my arms, and I refused, because of the shame you had brought upon me. Forgive me that, and come to my arms now."

A moment she hesitated, and then she laughed. "I do not care for your caresses," she replied.

"Very well," Martinez said, softly. "Good-by!"

"I do not even care to say good-by to you."

"Not say good-by? After all that we have been to each other?" Martinez was aghast.

She laughed at him again. "Go on your mission!" she cried. "I pray that you may fail."

"I shall not fail, señora," Martinez said. "You have steeled my arm. Come, Señor Shale!"

He led the way into the corridor and started toward the front door of the building, Shale at his heels. The colonel did not speak as they made their way across the plaza and up the avenue toward the arsenal on the hill. They came across no troops, no rebels. The battle was raging in the other end of the town again, and a passing neutral said that the loyal troops had the rebels besieged there. But others were scattered through the town, doing their work of pillage and arson, and the rebellion was far from being quelled.

Once they were obliged to enter a building to escape the detection of loyal rurales galloping through the street. After they had passed, the colonel and Shale went into the street again and hurried on. Then the colonel broke the silence.

"You say that Miss Hemton and you are to be free, as soon as I am turned over to Captain Gomez?" he asked.

"That was what Gomez promised," said Shale.

"Then I must delay my work until I am sure that you two are safe."

"There will scarcely be time for that," Shale said. "You'll probably be searched for weapons at once."

"Yet it must be done," the colonel answered. "I must delay my work in some manner. You must hurry him all that you can."

"I'll do my part," Shale replied. "Do you think that there is any possible escape for you?"

"I do not look for an escape, except the welcome one that comes through death," the colonel replied.

They reached the bottom of the hill and started up the winding road. Shale bound the colonel's hands behind him, yet in such a manner that he could slip the ropes off easily. Then he drew his revolver, covered the colonel with it, and forced him to walk ahead. It looked natural enough, as though the colonel were a prisoner under close guard.

Those in the arsenal saw them, and half a dozen men ran toward them down the road. They would have seized the colonel, but Shale waved them aside.

"This man is my prisoner," Shale said. "I am taking him to Captain Gomez."

The men fell in behind and followed up the hill. They came to the big doors of the arsenal and entered, walked through the long corridors and finally came to the commandant's room. Shale stood Colonel Martinez against a wall.

"Tell Captain Gomez that I have returned," he said.

One of the orderlies hurried out, and soon the captain entered and stood at the head of the table, an evil smile upon his lips once more.

"Señor Shale, I see that you have succeeded," he said. "Almost any man can succeed in an undertaking, when the life of his sweetheart depends on it."

"I have brought you the prisoner," Shale replied.

"Where are the men who went with you?"

"Dead!" said Shale, briefly.

"What?" he cried.

"We were caught in a trap. I was taken to headquarters. I managed to get possession of Colonel Martinez and get him away," Shale explained.

"Excellent!" Gomez cried. "You make a wonderful soldier."

"And I want to remind you of your promise to me," Shale added.

"I have not forgotten it," Gomez said. He beckoned to one of the guards. "Have the American girl brought here," he ordered. As the man departed to obey, Captain Gomez sat down at the end of the table. "Colonel Martinez," he said, "I suppose you are wondering why I was so eager to have you a prisoner."

"I suppose that a traitor, leading rebels, naturally would want to conquer a loyal officer," the colonel replied.

"This is no time for calling names, Colonel Martinez! Do you wonder why I had you brought here?"

"I have not considered it," said Martinez.

"We are going to have a long talk, and, when it is finished, you will understand many things, particularly how a man like me gets revenge!" Gomez declared.

"Revenge?" Martinez cried. "What have I ever done that you seek revenge on me? Are you going to kill me for some slight, some petty disagreement?"

"I seek revenge for a deeper fault," said Gomez, "regarding which we'll speak a little later. Just now, there is something else to do—a promise to this gentleman to fulfill."

The guard returned with Elizabeth Hemton.

"Señor Shale and this young lady are to have escort and protection out of the town," Captain Gomez directed. Then he turned to Shale. "You see how I keep my promise," he added. "Let me congratulate you on your good work."

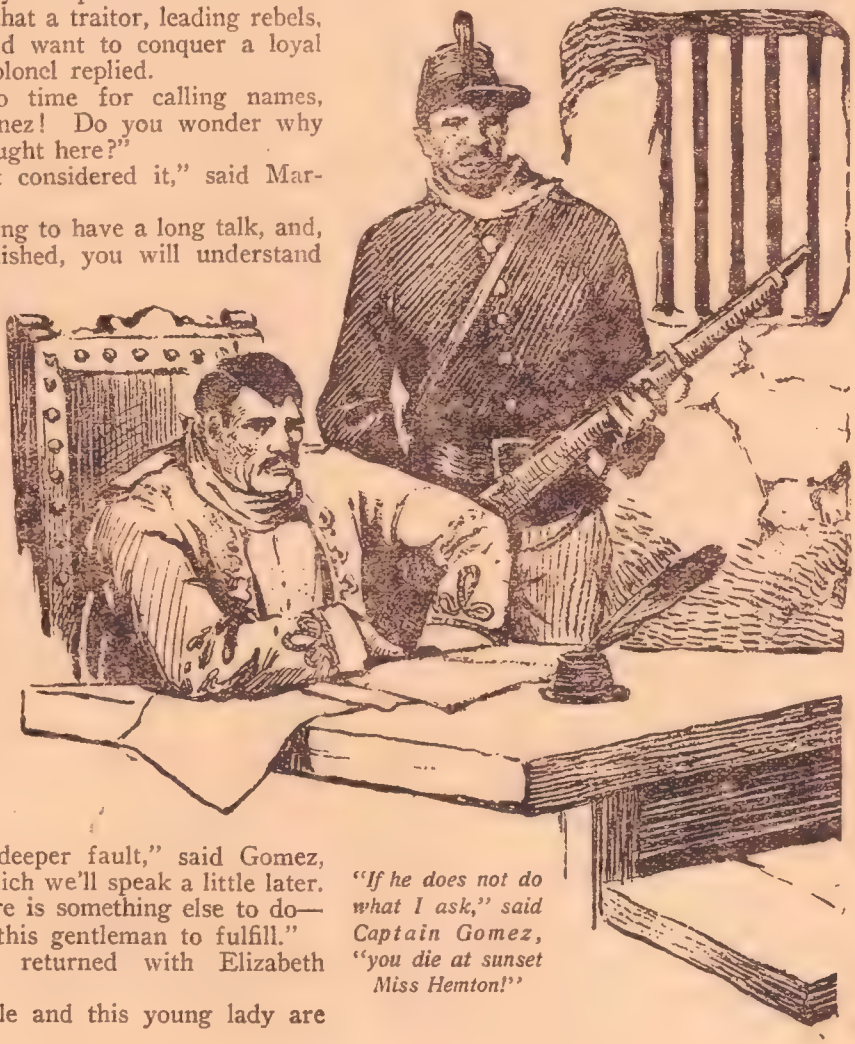
"Thanks for keeping your promise," Shale said. "But what are you going to do with Colonel Martinez? I'm a bit interested."

"I am going to talk to him, let him know a few things that will eat into his proud heart."

"You are brutal!" Shale cried. "In less than half an hour, his wife dies before a firing squad."

"I am less brutal than you think, señor, for his wife will not die at sunset."

"What do you mean?" Shale cried. "How can it be avoided? She is a pris-



*"If he does not do what I ask," said Captain Gomez, "you die at sunset Miss Hemton!"*

oner at headquarters in town, awaiting the hour of execution. Colonel Martinez took his farewell of her just a short time ago."

"What is this?" Gomez demanded.

"The truth, Captain Gomez! Would you torture this man when his wife is at the point of death?"

"Nonsense!" Gomez laughed. "Señora Martinez is not at headquarters in town, because she is here!"

"Here? How can that be?" Shale cried. "Surely, you're joking!"

Gomez motioned to the guard again. "Bring Señora Martinez here," he said. "My word is questioned."

They all waited, wondering what could have happened. Soon the door opened, and Señora Martinez stood there. With a glad cry she rushed across the room to her husband.

"Manuel! Manuel!" she called. "You have come to save me?"

"You see, she is here," Gomez said.

They stood like men turned to stone—Shale and the colonel. They had come to the arsenal without delay. And how could this woman have escaped from headquarters and reached the fortress before them?

'Manuel!" she cried again.

Colonel Martinez thrust her away from him. "What does this mean?" he asked. "I left you in town less than an hour ago. You sneered at me, refused to bid me farewell, said that you were not my wife and that I was nothing to you."

"Manuel! Are you insane?" she cried. "I have not been to the headquarters in town."

"Can I not believe my own eyes?" the colonel demanded. "Do not torture me further! Kill me, and be done with it!"

"Manuel! What do you mean?" she cried.

"Less than an hour ago, in town, you laughed at me, said you were not my wife——"

Captain Gomez sprang from his chair. "What are you saying?" he cried. "You are certain that you saw Señora Martinez at headquarters a short time ago?"

"Certainly she was there," Shale put in. "She was doomed to die at sunset."

"At sunset!" Gomez cried. "Then they have her! They will shoot her down!"

He whirled upon them, rage in his face, and sorrow also.

"I'll get even with them!" he cried. "I showed you how to keep a promise, Señor Shale. I'll show you how to break one, too! You'll die, all of you, at sunset!"

"You cur!" Shale cried.

"All of you!" Gomez repeated. "I'll be even with them! All your lives are not worth as much as hers."

"Of whom are you speaking?" Martinez asked.

Gomez stopped abruptly in the center of the room. A peculiar gleam gradually overspread his face.

"I—I think that I am perhaps out of my mind," he said. "But you shall die at sunset, all of you, just the same!"

Señora Martinez had stepped to the colonel's side. "What did you mean, Manuel?" she was asking. "I did not refuse to bid you farewell. I have not been at headquarters, I did not laugh at you. I love you, Manuel, with my whole heart and soul!"

Shale glanced at her in astonishment, for he had heard her words. And this was the woman who had scorned both him and the colonel an hour before. It was the same woman, the same voice, the same features —even the same costume!

"Seize these people!" Gomez shouted to the guard. "All of them are to be shot

at sunset! I wish to be present at the execution, so inform me when all is ready."

"The señora, too?" the men cried. "Kill the señora?"

"All of them, I said!"

"But the señora has fought with us," one of them protested. "Kill the señora, whom we all love?"

"All—all!" Gomez cried. "Dare you disobey my commands? Have the entire garrison drawn up, and see that there are no mistakes. I am not making a mistake when I insist on the señora's death. It is necessary to our success!"

The men started forward to seize the prisoners. In that instant, Colonel Martinez slipped the thongs that bound him. His right hand swung free, darted into the front of his blouse, came out again holding the weapon.

His arm jerked upward. There was a flash, a roar, a puff of smoke. Elizabeth Hemton screamed and clung to Shale. Señora Martinez gave a cry of fear. The men uttered cries and milled around the room. But, rising above all other sounds, came Captain Gomez' screams, the most terrible cry of all—the scream of a dying man.

Then the curtain of smoke drifted to one side, and they saw him on the floor at the end of the table, a gaping wound in his breast. The next instant, guards were upon the prisoners, holding them fast.

"So may all traitors die!" Martinez cried.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A FIERY TRAP.

THERE was absolute silence for a moment. Then came screams of rage from the rebels. In an instant, the room was a confusion of shouting, fighting men, who jostled the prisoners against one another.

Shale noticed that, in their excitement, they allowed Martinez to retain the revolver, though they held his arms. Elizabeth Hemton was clinging to Shale, frightened, her eyes wide with horror. And then one of the rebels assumed command, and some semblance of order came out of the chaos.

"What does this mean?" he demanded of Colonel Martinez.

"It means that I have killed a traitor," retorted the colonel defiantly.

"But what are you doing here? Are you a prisoner?"

"Captain Gomez ordered me brought here a prisoner. Señor Shale brought me."

The rebel turned to Shale. "You brought him at Captain Gomez' command?" he asked. "You are one of us, then?"

"I captured the colonel and brought him here at Captain Gomez' request," Shale replied. "As for being one of you—don't you see that I am? I can best serve if you are careful not to let everybody know my standing."

The subterfuge worked. The man smiled, and saluted, and took a step backward. "But we do not understand Captain Gomez' death," he said.

Martinez started to speak, but Shale silenced him. "Captain Gomez," Shale said, "was not with you heart and soul. He was using your cause only as a means for personal revenge."

The rebel held a conversation in whispers with some of the others, then hurried back. "Señor Shale, you are free to take the American señorita away," he said. "As for the señora, we know how to respect her, of course. As for the colonel, an enemy who has shot our chief, we have decided that he must die."

"He did you a service by shooting that double traitor." Shale replied.

"We have decided!" the rebel said. "Will you leave, with the señorita, now, please? When you are safe, we commence firing at the town again."

Señora Martinez stepped forward between the rebels and her husband.

"Señores, you have said that I was the one to urge you to rebellion," she said. "You say that you respect my commands, that you would fight for me and die for me. Will you take my commands now?"

"What are they, señora?"

"The colonel is my husband, and I do not want him to die."

"If the señora will explain——"

"There is no time for explanations. I say that I do not wish him to be shot," said the señora in a tone of authority.

"But he killed Captain Gomez!" the rebel protested.

"Captain Gomez merited death," she answered. "Just before he was killed, he gave orders for me to be killed at sunset. He knew, you see, that I had learned he was a double traitor."

"That is so!" one of them cried, who had heard the orders.

"Would you have done it?" she asked.

"No—no!"

"Very well. Gomez is dead, but your cause did not die with him. There is still a chance for you. Will you take commands from me?" she repeated.

Her magnetism seemed to draw them. They swarmed toward her. "Yes!" they cried. "We take orders from you! You command the arsenal!"

"Then Colonel Martinez must live!"

"He lives, señora, if you so command."

"I do not accept——" Martinez started to say.

Shale silenced him. "She's playing a part!" Shale whispered. "She's no traitor! Wait! See what the outcome will be."

"What are your commands, señora?" one of the men asked.

"Leave us for a time, and let us decide," she replied. "Return when I call, and in the meantime go about your business."

They hurried from the room, carrying Gomez' body with them. Then the señora walked across to the others.

"Señor Shale," she said, "you had better take Miss Hemton away as soon as possible. Then you two will be safe. You, my husband, must escape and return to your headquarters and your duties. I return to headquarters also, to die at sunset. If I do not, your life will be forfeit, and that must not be."

"How did you escape from headquarters and get to the arsenal ahead of us?" Shale asked.

"I have been here at the arsenal all the time," she said.

"But I met you in the street, you were captured with me, I saw you taken to a room under a heavy guard," insisted Shale.

"I have not left the arsenal since I was first carried here," she declared.

"Señora——" Shale began, then stopped. What was the use? There seemed to be no sensible explanation. What manner of woman was she? Would this mystery ever be explained?

"You came here to kill Gomez?" she asked the colonel.

"I did," he said.

"I am glad that you succeeded, Manuel."

"Less than an hour ago, at headquarters, you said that you would pray for my failure," he said, with a bitter smile.

"Manuel! What can you mean? I tell you that I was not at headquarters!"

"Enough of this nonsense!" he cried. "I have eyes and ears, señora, and they have never failed me yet."

"You will not believe me?" she pleaded.

"I'd rather believe my eyes and ears."

"And you, Señor Shale?" she asked.

"Señora, there seems to be some mystery," Shale replied, "but I feel sure everything will be explained in time."

Elizabeth Hemton went over to the señora. "I believe in you," she said, putting an arm about her shoulders.

"But what are we to do?" Shale asked. "It will be sunset in less than an hour."

"You are to take the señorita and get out of town as quickly as possible," the señora said. "Colonel Martinez and myself must try to reach headquarters."

"You go to certain death," Shale pointed out. "Let the colonel return. You can save yourself by coming with us."

"Perhaps, if I return to certain death, they will at last believe in my innocence," she replied. "It is the only way. Is it not, my husband?"

"It is the only way," Martinez echoed, sadly.

"I'd rather die for a crime I never committed, than shame my husband and stain his good name by escaping with suspicion upon me," said Señora Martinez, in firm, clear tones.

Martinez whirled toward her. "Now, in spite of all, I believe you are my loyal wife!" he cried. She went to him with a glad cry.

"Then you believe me innocent?" she asked.

"I cannot believe you innocent with all the contrary evidence before me," he answered, "but I do believe that you are trying to atone for what you have done. If you go to death, it is with my love. But you shall not do it, for I intend to face the squad in your stead."

"No!" she cried. "I love you too much for that."

Colonel Martinez smiled, the first smile he had given in forty-eight hours. "We can decide that later," he said.

"Then I'll call the men," she said, and started for the door.

But suddenly a burst of firing came from the front of the arsenal, and a rattle of small arms from the distance. She went on toward the door. But before she

reached it, it was thrown open, and one of the men ran in.

"Señora!" he cried. "What are your commands? Our men in the town have been defeated. The loyal troops are storming the arsenal!"

"Storming the arsenal!" Martinez and Shale cried in a breath.

"Listen!" the rebel cried. "Hear the firing?" He ran out of the room again.

"We cannot escape now," the señora said.

Shale glanced at the colonel and saw that his face was alight.

"Don't you understand, Shale?" the colonel asked. "This is the end. Everything is in my hands now—the chance to vindicate my family name, to win an additional honor. The troops are storming the arsenal. And I, a loyal officer, am inside. The guns may be silenced, these rebels hurled into eternity, in a second of time! I was commanding officer here once. I know the place well—all its secrets. Can't you understand, Shale? Touch a button, and the rebellion ends in a flash of flame!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### PITS OF SAFETY.

COLONEL MARTINEZ hurried across the room to his wife's side.

"Manuel, you would kill all of us," she said. "You are a soldier, and I am ready to die. But Señor Shale and the young lady have no part in this."

"We'll try to get them to some place of safety," was the reply. "The first thing is to communicate with the loyal troops and inform them that Gomez is dead, and to explain what I am going to do. If that is not done, they'll never know that my work was accomplished."

"How can you communicate with the troops?" she asked.

"From the signal tower at the corner of the arsenal!"

He ran into the corridor, and the others followed him. In the outer passage, the rebels stopped the party.

"Where are you going?" they demanded.

"To the signal tower," Martinez replied.

"We cannot allow that. You are a loyal officer. You must go below as a prisoner until the fight is over."

The señora stepped before him. "This is the fight that tells everything," she said. "It is my wish that you allow my husband to go to the tower. Do you think that I would consent to anything that would defeat your purposes?"

Their thoughts could be read by the expressions in their faces. They were thinking that perhaps Colonel Martinez was not so loyal as they had believed, and that his love for his wife now held him to their cause. They talked among themselves for a moment, then told the señora that Martinez could proceed to the tower.

He started, and the other three went with him. They came to the tower and glanced down the slope toward the town. The loyal troops were advancing on every side, in regular formation, with determined purpose in their movements.

The men in the arsenal were firing steadily. Down on the slope, men were dropping, but others constantly came on.

"They must be held back," the colonel said. "It will mean death for them to come too near."

The colonel entered the signal room and caught up a signal flag. Then he stepped out upon a little balcony and faced the approaching troops. He held the flag above his head, and waited an instant. Then he began waving it back and forth in the intricate vocabulary of the wigwag. He paused, began again, paused again.

"They see you!" the señora cried.

Martinez was sending his message: "This is Martinez. I have shot Captain Gomez and have escaped alive. Report to General Ambrosio."

There was a pause, then another flag began flapping far below, and Martinez read the reply: "The general sends his compliments and says that he will not forget."

The colonel wigwagged again: "I can stop the rebellion by blowing up the arsenal. Tell General Ambrosio what I am going to do. The troops will have to be held back."

Another pause, and then the answer: "General Ambrosio approves plan, and thanks you."

The señora stepped to the colonel's side and whispered something. The colonel resumed his signaling: "Señora Martinez is here with me. She bids me tell the general that, if she escapes alive from the arsenal, she will return to headquarters and prove her loyalty by facing the firing squad."

The answer to that was a question: "Are you sure that Señora Martinez is with you?"

"She reached the arsenal before we did," the colonel answered.

"You must be mistaken. Señora Martinez is at headquarters now under a strong guard, doomed to die within half an hour."

"My wife is here with me," the colonel reported. "I'll have her step out on the balcony. Look at her through your glasses."

She went out upon the balcony and stood beside him. After a time, the flag below talked again.

"We recognize the señora. General Ambrosio says that there is some mystery he cannot fathom. He urges you and the señora to escape unharmed if possible."

"Some mystery!" Shale cried, when the colonel repeated the message aloud.

"This is not a time to solve mysteries," the colonel objected. "See, the advance has stopped already! Now to get you and the young lady to safety, Señor Shale, and then to end this affair!"

"They cannot leave the arsenal now," the señora said.

"Then there is but one thing to do," the colonel replied. "We must get Señor Shale and the señorita to the safest place we can find and keep them there until the arsenal is destroyed. There is a chance they may escape unharmed."

He left the balcony and went back into the signal room. As he reached the door, a number of shots rang out from below, inside the arsenal wall, and bullets crashed near him.

"They're shooting at you!" Shale cried.

Rebels were shouting below, and running up the winding stairs that led to the tower. Martinez bolted the door.

"I don't understand it," he said. "But they'll have a hard time getting in here."

The men outside reached the door and began hammering upon it.

"What do you want?" the colonel cried.

"You must come down from the tower," a man outside cried.

"Is it necessary for you to bring half a score of men with you to tell me that? Why do you wish me to leave the tower? The señora is here with me, and wishes me to remain."

"You were signaling!"

"Signaling?" the colonel cried.

"To General Ambrosio! We read your signals!"

The señora gave a cry of despair, and the colonel cursed under his breath. Elizabeth Hemton clung to Shale, fear in her eyes again.

"I refuse to leave the tower!" Martinez cried.

"You are to go below as a prisoner. Will you come out?"

"No!" the colonel cried.

"Then we'll break down the door and take you!

"Break down that door, and I'll kill the señora the moment you do so!" the colonel threatened.

Outside there were cries of baffled rage. Then their leader spoke again.

"If we go away, will you leave the tower and go below?" he asked.

"Yes, but not as a prisoner. I'll have the señora walk before me, and at first sign of treachery she dies."

"Very well, sir!" the man outside called.

They heard the rebels going back down the stairs. They waited for a time, and then the colonel opened the door cautiously and looked out. There was no one in sight.

So they left the signal tower, the señora leading, Martinez close behind her with a revolver in his hand to make his threat good in the eyes of the men. Elizabeth and Shale followed. They reached the lower floor, and there they met the rebels' leader.

"Colonel Martinez, you signaled to General Ambrosio," he accused.

"I signaled that Captain Gomez was dead."

"Nothing else?"

"Did you read anything else?"

"There was something else," the man declared. "Tell me!"

"I signaled that I was alive, and that the señora was with me."

"Why should you wish to tell the general those things?"

"Perhaps in the way of a boast," the colonel replied. "The señora, you understand, was sentenced to die at sunset. It is within half an hour of sunset now, and it seems unlikely that she will die as they said."

The rebel did not appear to be fully satisfied, but he looked swiftly at the

señora, who was smiling as though in support of her husband's words.

"It is all right, señora?" he asked.

"Quite all right!"

"But he threatened to kill you if we broke into the tower."

"He was afraid that you would do him violence in your anger, before you understood what the signals meant," she said.

"Where do you intend going now?"

The colonel answered him. "I was commanding officer here once, and know all about the place," he said. "We have with us a man and a young woman who are taking no part in the battle. They are Americanos, and must not be harmed. I want to get them to some place of safety until the battle is over."

"Where are you going to take them?" the man persisted.

"To the rear of the building, in the pits behind the arsenal. The fighting is on the other side. They'll be safe there."

"We do not like to trust you there. We are not certain whether you are loyal to us."

Martinez smiled and turned to the señora. "See!" he said. "I give my revolver, the only weapon on me, to the señora. Surely you know where she stands in this affair."

"We do not doubt the señora. But you are the señora's husband. Her love for you might make her hesitate. I'll send a man with you."

"How do I know your man will not fire upon me without sufficient cause?"

"The señora may watch the man. If he fires upon you without cause, the señora will have the man's life in her hands."

"You might be willing to sacrifice an ordinary soldier in exchange for my life," Martinez said. "Suppose that you go with us yourself."

"I'll do that! Lead the way!" the man said.

Martinez started along the corridor, the rebel close behind him, the señora behind the rebel, and Shale and Elizabeth Hemton following. Every second that Martinez delayed, meant the death of more loyal soldiers, for the men in the arsenal were firing furiously.

Through corridor after corridor they went. And after a time they came to the safety pits of the arsenal, built as places of retreat in time of disaster. Heavy doors cut the pits off from the arsenal proper.

"They will be safe here," Martinez said.

"I think," the rebel replied, "that all of you will be safe here. I see that you can be locked in securely. You'll be kept here until the battle is over."

"If you wish it," the colonel assented.

Shale wondered at the colonel's ready agreement, but he soon found the reason.

"As soon as it is safe," the rebel continued, "I'll see that Señor Shale and his lady are escorted out of town. Until then, they remain here. You are to remain with them, Colonel Martinez. The señora, I suppose, will return with me to the main part of the arsenal and cheer the men by her presence."

The señora's face paled.

"And if disaster comes," Martinez said, quickly, "the señora would meet death. Do you wish for that? Has she not done enough for you already? At least leave her here until such time as you are losing ground, and her presence to cheer on the men is deemed necessary."

"That seems reasonable," the rebel said.

He went out and closed the door, and they could hear him shooting the heavy bolts into place.

"What can you do now?" Shale asked the colonel. "You're a prisoner in this place."

"It could not be better," the colonel replied. "It is just what I wanted."

"What do you mean?" Shale asked.

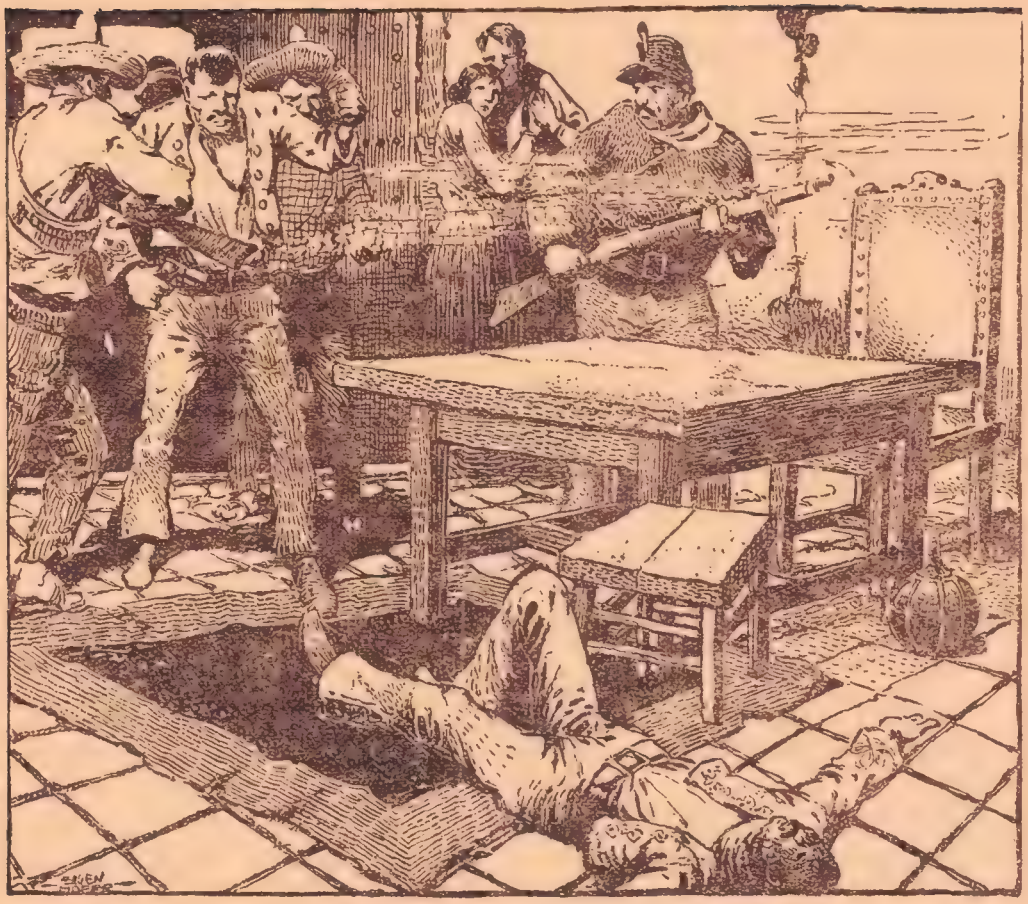
The colonel stepped across the room, touched a spot in the wall, and a panel rolled back. The others saw an electrical switchboard.

"This was built for emergency," the colonel said. "These pits were constructed as places of retreat in case the arsenal should be taken. And it was so arranged that by touching a button the magazines could be fired from here, and the captors of the arsenal blown up. You understand? I have only to press this button!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### AT THE TOUCH OF A BUTTON.

THEY recoiled from it, stunned by the ingenuity of the death trap. A touch on that button, and the arsenal would become a heap of smoking ruins.



*"So may all traitors die!" Martinez cried.*

"And we will die like rats in here!" Elizabeth cried.

"There is no danger here, señorita," the colonel told her. "After the fortress is destroyed, we will wait for a time, until the night comes, then try to leave and reach the loyal troops."

The señora sat down on a rough bench at one side of the dark room, and the colonel motioned Shale to put Elizabeth Hemton beside her. Then he stepped to the switchboard again, dimly seen by the others in the faint light. His hand went out toward the little switch. He threw it. Then his finger pressed against the button.

Half a second passed, then there came a crash that seemed to rip open the world. A blast seemed to tear the floor of the pit from beneath their feet. Piercing shrieks reached their ears. There was another second of half silence, and then a series of dull sounds told of the falling masonry that had been hurled high in the air.

The señora clasped the American girl in her arms. Martinez staggered to the middle of the room. Tears were streaming down his face.

"Heaven help them!" he said.

Then another sound reached those in the pit—the sound of distant cheering, as the loyal troops applauded the destruction of the arsenal.

The colonel beckoned to Shale, and together they went carefully around the pit, looking for a means of escape. The explosion of the magazines had not broken the bolts on the door. But there was a tiny hole in one wall, caused by falling masonry. Together they dug at it until it was large enough to admit the passage of a human body; and at last they all crawled through, into the open air.

Night was falling. A part of the ruins

was in flames, and parts of the town were burning. The loyal troops were approaching across the ruins, searching them.

Colonel Martinez shouted, and some of the soldiers came running. They were talking wildly.

"It is Martinez! He was one of them!" a rurale shouted.

"Back!" the colonel cried.

"He was one of them! He was in the arsenal!" they insisted.

"Stop!" Shale cried. "We're friends!"

"There's another—the gringo! He fought with them in the streets!"

The soldiers rushed forward, weapons ready. The party had no weapons save the colonel's revolver, which his wife still held; there was nothing to do except submit. They were all prisoners, and bound, in a few minutes.

"The señora must be taken before the general immediately," one of the sergeants said. "Those are orders!"

"And the men?" another asked.

"Let them die! All traitors should die!"

"Back!" the colonel cried. "You do not know what you are doing. Take us to the general!"

"We have orders to execute all rebels on sight," the sergeant said.

"We are not rebels! I was the man who destroyed the arsenal!" the colonel shouted.

"A likely story," the sergeant sneered. "Make ready, men!"

Cartridges clicked into the chambers of rifles, and the rifles were leveled. And then somebody rushed between the squad and their victims. It was Sergeant Torello.

"Up with your rifles!" he cried. "You take orders from me! I am attached to headquarters. These men and women are to be taken before the general at once. Colonel Martinez killed Captain Gomez and then blew up the arsenal. He is a hero! And you would have executed him!"

Torello's speech had the ring of truth, and furthermore, he was recognized as a headquarters man. The men dropped their rifles and surged forward. Their mood had changed in an instant. Now they lifted the colonel to their shoulders and cheered, and then conducted the four down the hill to the spot where General Ambrosio was waiting.

The general did not speak for a moment. Then he stepped forward and held out his hand to Colonel Martinez.

"I thank you, sir," the general said. "And I am glad to see that Señor Shale is safe, and also Miss Hemton. I am glad that the señora escaped, also, though it is past my belief that she can be here. I am certain that she is at this moment safe under guard at headquarters in the town."

"I cannot understand!" Martinez said.

"Nor can I, exactly. We are going back to headquarters now, and I trust that some explanation will be forthcoming there."

He gave orders to an aid and horses were brought forward. They mounted, and went down the hill to the town. There was no need for torches, for buildings still blazed. They came to the plaza and crossed it, picking their way among the ruins, and so came finally to headquarters. There they dismounted, passed through the lines of the guard, and came, at last, into the general's room.

"Señora Martinez," the general said, after they all were seated, "at an early hour this morning, a court-martial decided that you were guilty of treason and sentenced you to death. You were to be shot at sunset, but at sunset you were not our prisoner. Do you still maintain your innocence?"

"Before Heaven, I do!" she replied.

"Do you still say that you did not open that door and save Señor Shale and Sergeant Torello?"

"I did not!"

"Nor did you talk to rebels in the plaza?"

"No."

"It was not you who urged them to go into the streets and fight?"

"It was not," she said, firmly.

"You were taken from headquarters by the rebels soon after being convicted?" went on the general.

"I was; but I went with them under protest."

"Is that true, Señor Shale?" the general asked.

"It is true, sir," Shale replied. "Señora Martinez declared to their faces that she did not know them and had no desire to be rescued."

"You saw her taken with you to a cer-

tain courtyard where the rebels had established their headquarters?"

"I did," Shale replied. "She was placed in a room under guard."

"And a few minutes later she was out in the courtyard urging the rebels to fight?" the general persisted.

"I do not care to answer that question," Shale said.

"You may do so, señor, without fear that your answer will harm Señora Martinez."

"Then," Shale said, "it is true that a few minutes after she was placed in the room under guard, she appeared in the courtyard and urged the rebels to go into the street and fight."

Señora Martinez sprang to her feet. "I swear that I did no such thing!" she cried. "I remained in that room for more than an hour, then found that all of the men were gone, and so escaped."

"All this has my head whirling!" Shale said. "I'm sure that it was the señora who came into the courtyard."

General Ambrosio got up and paced back and forth across the side of the room. "I believe," he said finally, "that we are facing a solution of this mystery, the like of which I never have known before."

He called an orderly.

"Send the officers of the guard to me," he commanded.

They waited for a few minutes, and presently the captain in charge of the guard came in and stood at salute.

"You still guard Señora Martinez?" the general asked.

The captain looked across the room at the señora, and his eyes bulged.

"I'll swear, sir, that the señora was a prisoner less than fifteen minutes ago, when I looked in upon her," the captain of the guard said. "I have not neglected my duty, sir! If the men have allowed her to escape it shall be the worse for them."

"You had better make an immediate investigation," the general suggested.

The captain saluted and departed, and the general walked back and forth along the side of the room again. The señora clung to her husband, and Elizabeth Hemton, calm again, stayed close to Martin Shale.

Suddenly steps sounded in the corridor, and the captain of the guard rushed into the room.

"Sir! Sir!" he gasped.

"Well?" the general snapped.

"Señora Martinez is still a prisoner in her room.

"Yet you see her here," the general said, smiling.

"I cannot understand it!" the captain cried.

"If Señora Martinez is a prisoner in her room, bring her here," the general instructed.

Again the captain of the guard saluted and hurried out. Those in the room waited breathlessly, scarcely knowing what to expect. Presently the captain of the guard entered and stood to one side of the door. Two soldiers entered behind him, and walking between them, head held high, her dark eyes flashing defiance, her lips curled in scorn, was—Señora Martinez!

Those in the room sprang to their feet. Martinez gave a strange cry. The woman beside him sprang to her feet and stared at her counterpart in the door.

"You!" she screamed. "You?"

Then she reeled, and Martin Shale sprang forward and caught her in his arms.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ONE MUST DIE!

SHALE looked, first at the woman in the doorway, and then at the one in his arms. The one in his arms raised her head and stood away from him. The two were alike in form and features, in voice, even in dress.

Shale brushed his hands across his eyes as though not able to believe his eyes. One of those women, he knew, was the wife of Colonel Martinez. And who was the other, the one standing in the doorway? Which was the woman who had saved him the night before, with Torello, and which was the one who had been at the arsenal?

For a moment, the two women looked at each other, eyes flashing. Then the woman in the doorway spoke.

"Well?" she said.

"How came you here?" the other asked.

"I was captured and carried here. They took me for——"

"For the wife of Colonel Martinez!" Shale cried.

But the woman beside him raised her

hand for silence. "I am Señora Martinez," she said. "Allow me, señores, to acquaint you with my twin sister."

"A twin?" Martinez cried.

"Kindly be seated, señores," said Señora Martinez, calm now. "We are all fatigued."

They sat down and turned toward her, all except the colonel. He remained standing in the center of the room within a few feet of his wife, astonishment in every line of his face.

"This woman is my twin sister," the señora said. "This is the first time I have seen her for more than ten years."

"But, señora——" the colonel began.

"I beg of you to listen, Manuel," she said. "This sister of mine disgraced her family some fifteen years ago, and was turned away from home. She married a man far beneath her. After I was married to Colonel Martinez, I gave her money, but refused to receive her among my friends. Hence, my sister and I drifted apart.

"She swore that before she died she would disgrace me," went on Señora Martinez. "She was envious of my position and my happy married life. She declared that the same persons who called her an outcast would call me the same. That was ten years ago, and she has made several attempts to carry out her threat."

They glanced at the woman in the doorway. Defiance was gone from her face and manner; she seemed ashamed.

"But she did not succeed," Señora Martinez went on, "until yesterday. When word came to headquarters that rebellion had broken out, there was an immediate investigation. Although I had been confined to my room by illness for two days, I was confronted by the general, by my husband, and by other officers. They accused me of inciting men to rebellion. They said that I had talked to the men in the plaza. I had been seen—there was no mistake, they said. The spies even reported what costume I wore.

"Do you understand now, señores? I, the wife of a loyal officer, was accused of sedition. My husband, therefore, was in disgrace. I tried to defend myself, but I failed. My husband left me in anger."

"Señora," the general interrupted, "spare yourself an ordeal. You mean that this woman, your sister, has impersonated you, has done this thing and thrown suspicion upon you?"

"Yes," the señora replied. "Everybody was tricked, even the rebels. They thought that Señora Martinez was leading them. They trusted in that belief, and they were shot down like dogs!"

The woman in the doorway bowed her head.

"And that is not all," the señora continued. "Either my husband or I must pay the penalty for my sister's crime. The laws of war make certain demands in a case like this."

"Let this sister of yours——" Shale began, angrily.

"Would you have me murder my sister?" she asked. "No one knew of this sister of mine. I never told my husband, for when I met him, five years ago, people had all but forgotten my sister's existence. If this truth comes out, my family is shamed again, and my husband is shamed. It is better that the sentence of the court-martial be carried out, and that I die."

"Wouldn't you shame the colonel more by dying?" Shale asked.

"No. He has won new honors to-day. And he loves me no longer—he could not now, since he has learned of my family shame."

"You would die to wipe out a stain on the family name?" Shale asked in amazement.

"But certainly, señor!"

"Those are extreme measures, señora, and unnecessary, it seems to me," Shale said. "Colonel, can't you straighten this out?"

"It makes no difference whether my wife or my wife's sister is guilty," the colonel replied. "The shame is on my family. My wife has spoken truly—one of us must face the squad."

"And which one?" Shale asked. "Surely not you, a loyal officer who proved himself to-day! Surely not your innocent wife!"

He stopped and glanced at the sister in the doorway.

"Why not me?" she asked, her voice calm. "My greed for vengeance has caused this disgrace. If the army demands a life, why not mine?"

"How did you do it?" the general demanded. "Tell us that!"

"It has been planned for some time," she replied. "My husband aided me, for he was in a position to do so. He became an officer in the army and managed to get transferred to a post near Colonel Martinez. Then I slipped into town. I had costumes made to match my sister's. My husband was at headquarters, and he kept me informed of my sister's movements. Two days ago, I went to the plaza and urged the men to rebel. They thought I was Señora Martinez. That is how it was done."

The general walked across to her. "You say that your husband is an officer at this post?" he said. "Tell me his name!"

"Do you think that I would cause my husband's death?" she demanded with some heat.

"You refuse to answer?"

"I do!"

"Then we'll have the truth out of you!" the general cried. "All my officers shall pass before you, and surely the man you call husband will betray himself."

The woman in the doorway smiled, as he issued orders for all the officers of the staff to be called. There were but twelve, now, for some had fallen during the fighting. Soon they were gathered in the hall.

"Señora, the officers of my staff are outside," the general said. "If you have spoken the truth, one of them is your husband. We shall see."

Then they entered, one at a time, and stood before her. But she betrayed no sign of recognition, and none of the officers betrayed himself. When the last had gone, she turned to the general again with a smile.

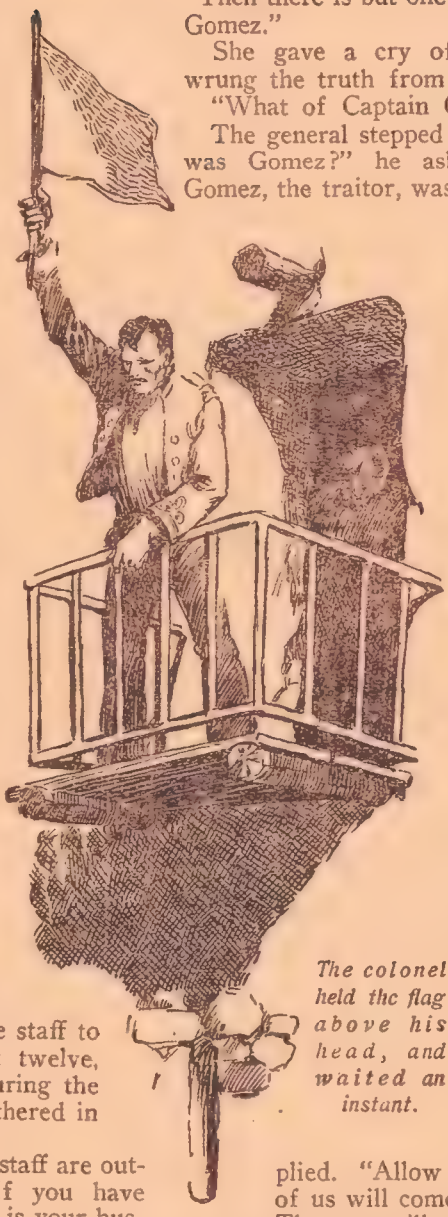
"Did you find out?" she asked. "It was no ordeal for me, for my husband was not among them."

"Not among them?" the general said. "Then there is but one other man, Captain Gomez."

She gave a cry of fright. He had wrung the truth from her.

"What of Captain Gomez?" she cried.

The general stepped before her. "So it was Gomez?" he asked. "If Captain Gomez, the traitor, was your husband, you are now a widow, señora!"



*The colonel held the flag above his head, and waited an instant.*

She stared at him for a moment, then the truth forced itself home to her.

"He was my husband," she said weakly.

"Now I can understand why he wanted me a prisoner in his hands," Martinez said.

Señora Martinez gained attention again. "We have not settled the most important question," she said. "If all of you will please leave this room, my sister and I will settle it between ourselves."

"What do you mean, señora?" the general asked.

"The stain on our family name must be washed away," she replied. "Allow us to settle it. One of us will come into the corridor. That one will go out into the plaza and take the death reserved for traitors. The other will go into the corridor also, but will go up the stairs to life and freedom. One of us must die, and we must settle the matter between ourselves. No one will ever know which one died for the one who lives will go away, forever."

"Señora!" Martinez cried.

"It is the only way," she said. "This disgrace belongs to my family, not to yours. You love me no longer," she went

on, after a moment. "Quick—before my heart fails me! Leave the room!"

They went out and waited in the corridor. They could hear the low voices of the women inside the room, but could not understand the words. Colonel Martinez looked through a window at the red sky; he seemed like a man dazed. From the distance came the sputter of scattering shots as the rebels made their last stand.

The minutes passed. Martinez turned from the window nervously. Bugles were blowing in the distance, and at the end of the hall an officer was telling off a firing squad. They were getting ready for the execution.

Then the door was opened, and the two sisters stood side by side. One could not be told from the other. The small differences there had been in appearance had been altered.

One turned up the hall, toward the stairway, and life.

The other turned down the corridor, toward death.

Colonel Martinez staggered against the wall, looking after the one who went down the corridor. He saw her pause at the door, then saw her disappear. There came the rattle of rifles, the gruff command of an officer, the slamming of a door closed hastily.

From the near distance came the sound of marching feet, then silence, then a command, and a crashing volley.

"My wife! My wife!" Martinez cried in anguish.

"Take Colonel Martinez to his room, and see that he does himself no harm!" the general ordered Sergeant Torello.

Torello led the stricken man away. The general turned to Shale, his eyes dark with sorrow.

"Señor Shale," he said, "all this seems, no doubt, cold-blooded to you, but you must remember that soldiers are sometimes forced to do things they do not relish. I'll leave you here for the present with Miss Hemton. As soon as possible, I'll give you an escort out of the town."

Shale and the girl talked for a time in whispers, their nerves gradually relaxing. And presently the door opened, and Colonel Martinez was before them.

"My friends," he said, "they thought that I would kill myself, but they were wrong. I can at least live with the memory of her in my mind. Only the great uncertainty is killing me. If I only knew!"

"You love your wife, then?" asked the general.

"With my whole heart and soul!" the colonel said. "She was wrong to think that this disgrace brought upon my name could kill my love for her."

"You would welcome her back if she lived?"

"Gladly!" the colonel cried. "Did my wife die? Does she live? If she is alive, I'll seek her!"

"That is all that I want to hear, Martinez!" the general said. "You need not go seeking her. Come here, colonel, my friend!"

He threw the door open wider, and the señora came into the room, the tears wet upon her cheeks, her hands outstretched.

"Manuel!" she cried.

Presently Sergeant Torello came in.

"Sir, the escort is waiting!" he reported to the general. "I have excellent horses for Señor Shale and the lady."

So Martin Shale rode back across the line with Elizabeth Hemton, and when they were safe in the States they breathed deeply as though coming from a bad dream. Things were sane there, they told themselves. It did not seem possible that only a few miles away people had such different ideas about things.

And two days later, when the news finally filtered through, Martin Shale read this in a newspaper:

An incipient revolution was quelled in the town of Quebrada, northern Mexico, recently when a detachment of government troops was attacked by rebels. There was sanguinary fighting for a few hours, and a part of the town was destroyed by fire. Several rebels were captured and executed by a firing squad, among them one woman.

"So that's all they make of it!" Shale muttered. "Gosh!"

# A One-Man Filly

By Harley P. Lathrop

*He thought he had the race fixed, but he didn't count on the woman.*

Illustrated by Roy Williams

*He did not trouble to explain how Desert Girl came into his hands, for he might have found it necessary to explain that he had killed the revolutionist who had claimed her.*

NOW may I niver train another horse, if she ain't the most gorgeous filly I iver set me eyes on!" exclaimed Shamus O'Sherry, looking down at the child. "Sure, nurse, she's the livin' picture of my grandmother when she was a girl. And 'twas commonly said my grandmother was the handsomest redhead in all Killarney."

Which, as a matter of comparison, if you care for an unbiased opinion, was drawing it a trifle thick. But, as this three-day-old young lady chanced to be Shamus O'Sherry's first-born, there is every reason to excuse his excessive enthusiasm.

"Come, Gorgeous," he wheedled, stretching out his arms. "Come to your daddy, mavourneen. Sure, nurse, and I believe she could travel the distance if ye'd let her try."

The nurse, a primly starched, competent-appearing woman, looked shocked and involuntarily hugged the tiny mite a trifle closer. "The very idea, Mr. O'Sherry," she reproved. "Also, while I think of it, your wife wished me to tell you she has named the baby Elnora."

"Nora is it," mused Shamus. "Well, we've had Kathleens, and Marys, and Kittys, in the family. But niver till now a Nora that I know of. 'Tis a good name. Let it ride."

So while she philosophically sucked one thumb and gazed at the vaulted cathedral ceiling, Father Collins baptized the redheaded mite Elnora, some three weeks later. Afterward, he duly inscribed the name in the parish register. But that was as far as it ever went. To Shamus O'Sherry, she was Gorgeous. Consequently, Gorgeous she became, to every one about Sweet Briar Farm, from old Asa the veteran ebony-colored swipe, on up to "Honest John" Britten, who had more millions than he could readily count, and whose racing string Shamus O'Sherry trained.

Gorgeous' mother died when she was three, and under her father's care the child grew up in the atmosphere of track and stable, which, contrary to most opinions,

is not at all contaminating. At twelve, she was a wiry, intense young person, with a mop of flaming red hair, a natural riding ability, and a vast determination. She loved horses even better than did old Shamus, if such was possible. And what a way she had with them!

"Sure, 'tis a gift that God lends once in a million times," Shamus often remarked in a reverent voice. "Take the case of King Midas now. If iver a divil was foaled, he's one—a kickin', rearin', biting scoundrel with the disposition of Satan himself, and as untrustworthy as a rattlesnake. But with Gorgeous, he's like a kitten. She could go to sleep a foot from his heels in perfect safety."

At sixteen, Gorgeous was introduced to what, for her, was a new world. She left the rambling old house where the O'Sherrys lived on Honest John's Kentucky estate, left behind the blue-grassed hills and valleys, and the horses she loved, and went away to school. She went rebelliously, for Gorgeous had a will of her own which thus far had seldom been thwarted; and she did not want to go.

Thereafter, Shamus O'Sherry, and this went as well for the entire personnel of Sweet Briar, marked the passing of time by three dates: Christmas and Easter, when Nora returned for a week's visit, and June which began her summer vacation.

Thus four years passed, dragging years, indeed, for Shamus. Meantime, Honest John Britten became obsessed with the idea of producing the great American winner; so he had gradually let his attention stray from the track itself in favor of intensive breeding.

Shamus sorely missed the glamorous excitement of paddock and track, which heretofore had filled the major portion of each year. And with this letting down, came a growing desire to have Gorgeous at home again.

She returned, one velvety June night, while Shamus was visiting at a neighboring farm. His first sight of her came when he, with Honest John, was making an early morning round of observation. True to her hereditary instincts, Nora's first thought was of the horses. So arising early, she had made her way directly to the paddock of her greatest favorite, King Midas, he of the vicious temper and the pedigree that traced back to the Godolphin Barb.

But King Midas, late in the winter, had gone the ultimate way of all horseflesh. Now, his special paddock was occupied by a daughter, a leggy filly whose coat matched the color of Nora O'Sherry's hair. It was there, coming round a corner with his employer, that Shamus found the two together.

What a picture they made, standing side by side in the old arched entranceway. Flowering honeysuckle, in luxuriant profusion, covered the ancient archway and thrust dewy tendrils down, to form a setting of green and pink.

Shamus O'Sherry, who had viewed the gathered beauties of two continents at many a famous turf classic, caught his breath with an involuntary gasp. "Merciful heavens!" he murmured, and there was awe and wonder in his voice.

It is not easy to describe Nora O'Sherry. With full maturity, her hair had darkened from flaming scarlet to a glowing mahogany. When she smiled, her mouth would have seemed a bit too wide perhaps, had it not been for a curious little enticing quirk which drew the corners downward. Her skin was faultless, and as delicately colored as the honeysuckle that brushed her cheeks. She had her father's eyes—Irish eyes that were an indescribable tawny green like the cool green of a Killarney lake when the gold of a setting sun is on it. And, as a crowning glory, Nora O'Sherry was gloriously and wholly alive with the superabundant vitality of youth.

Shamus O'Sherry laughed a full-throated laugh of joy at sight of her, but Honest John Britten took an apprehensive step forward.

"Come away, Gorgeous," he begged. "Come away quickly, please. That filly is not to be trusted."

Nora's arm tightened about the red filly's neck, and she rubbed her cheek along the satiny coat. "Why I think she is a perfect dear, Uncle John," she answered without moving.

Perplexity was mingled with alarm in Honest John's eyes, and he put a beseeching hand on his companion's shoulder.

But Shamus only laughed. "Can it be, John," he asked, "that ye have forgotten Gorgeous has a way with horses? This is a King Midas filly, and the King, if

ye'll remember, was the lass' first love." Honest John Britten, who had as tender a place in his heart for Nora O'Sherry as he would had she been his own flesh and blood, uttered a relieved sigh. "I had forgotten, sure enough, Shamus," he acknowledged, and stood silent for a moment, gazing reflectively at the pair.

What a picture! Truly they made a gorgeous couple, both a-quiver with the sheer joy of youth and life. And, queerly enough, there seemed to be some connecting bond between them, some invisible thread of trust and understanding. For there was perfect tranquillity in the great brown eyes of the King Midas filly, a tranquillity as great and as deep as the love in the eyes of the girl. And this, mark you, was something neither Honest John Britten nor Shamus himself had ever thought to see. For this red descendant of an illustrious line had, from the day of her foaling, been an outlaw at heart, a true daughter of her father, with an added willfulness all her own.

Presently Honest John spoke, addressing himself to Shamus rather than to Nora. "I wonder, old friend," he said, "would you object if I gave Gorgeous this filly? The red filly will never submit to the usual training grind; we're both convinced of that. Moreover, she's too beautiful an animal to be used to perpetuate any line, which would eventually become her lot. So what say you, Shamus? Are you willing to risk Gorgeous having her and to see what love will do?"

Nora O'Sherry buried her face in the red filly's mane and stood tensely waiting her father's reply. On Sweet Briar Farm, her father's word was law, as immutable as the tides, and there was a great fear in her heart that Shamus would not allow her to accept the horse.

Again Shamus laughed. "'Tis a princely gift ye offer, John," he said. "But if ye wish it, have your way. For if there's a single person in the world that can tame yonder filly's rebellious spirit, Gorgeous is the one."

Thus did Nora O'Sherry become the owner of a long-legged red filly, that one day was to possess the speed of a meteor, the unquenchable courage of a bulldog, and a temper as capricious and fitful as an April breeze.

Summer passed, and winter. The following spring found the red filly undergoing its preliminary schooling, at the hands of her mistress. Old Shamus watched the daily work-out on the track and at the barrier with appreciative eyes. "Sure, Gorgeous," he told her with a twinkle in his eye, "'tis a mind I have to enter Firefly in the Futurity, providin' ye'll consent to ride her. But with any one else on her back, no show would she have. She'd be disqualified for disrupting the entire field."

But Fate, juggling with old Shamus' destiny, intervened and, by intervening, made sure Firefly would never face the barrier in those great maiden stakes. Nor was it ordained that old Shamus should witness their running. For the jovial, big-hearted Irishman whose boast it was that he could read at first glance the disposition of anything equine, gambled too heavily on this belief. Unaccompanied, he entered the stall of a nervous, high-strung mare, a recent acquisition to Sweet Briar. When, an hour later, Asa found him, Shamus was a pitiable hoof-battered wreck.

Gray-haired Doctor Logan, who long had been Shamus' friend, and who had brought Nora into the world, shook his head gravely after making the injured man comfortable.

"Don't worry, we'll pull him through, Gorgeous," he assured the white-faced girl. "But more than that, I can't say as yet."

It was late summer before he felt competent to render his final verdict. Old Shamus, a mere shell of his former ruddy self, was beginning to hobble about on crutches, every breath he drew a stab of agony.

"Not so bad, Shamus, old friend," he remarked. "But it'll do you no good, staying here. This air is a constant irritant to those battered lungs of yours. Go away to a drier climate for a year or so. You'll mend like a two-year-old there, and in the end be as good as ever."

So a fortnight later found the O'Sherrys ensconced on a tiny Arizona ranch not far from the edge of a myriad-colored desert. Their household was composed of just three—old Shamus, Nora, and the King Midas filly which had been named Firefly because, as Nora said, "Her temper winks on and off like a firefly at night."

Despite the strangeness of their surroundings, they had no chance to become

lonely. For when the news of their arrival became noised about, visitors began to appear, sunburned, quiet chaps most of them, bearing the marks of the range in their manner and apparel. Their drawled greetings all took the same general trend.

"A mighty fine filly, you have got in the corral yonder," would come the soft-voiced comment. "She can run, I reckon?"

And this cue old Shamus was quick to grasp. Given an interested listener, he would launch into an exhaustive discourse, dealing with Firefly's breeding. Then, with that topic exhausted, he would drift into an orgy of reminiscing which largely dealt with famous thoroughbreds he had trained and raced. And these soft-voiced young horsemen would listen with attentive ears.

"Now what do you think of that! And who'd ever have dreamed there was that much family attached to any horse!" they would comment respectfully when Shamus finished tracing a pedigree straight back for a full century.

Moreover, after one look at Nora, each one was anxious to establish himself as an assistant trainer to the filly. But regardless of Nora's feelings in the matter, Firefly would have none of them. She was a contrary maiden, fanciful and inconsistent, and, like her sire, prone to give way to sudden fits of berserker rage. A one-man, or rather a one-woman, filly was Firefly. She loved Nora O'Sherry, and Nora O'Sherry only. Toward her, she never exhibited any vagaries of temper.

Long since, old Shamus had decided eight furlongs was Firefly's distance. So they measured off an eight-furlong course adjoining the ranch. And there, late of an evening, with the desert for a background, gleaming purple, and blue, and scarlet under the rays of a setting sun, Nora would ride Firefly. Sometimes against her father's stop watch, sometimes against the pony of a visitor.

Thus the months drifted by, and then one day another stranger came riding up to the little ranch. Shamus, who was whiling away the forenoon in the shade of the gallery, called an invitation for him to stop.

He was a lithely built man with close-cropped dark hair and a face lightly furrowed about the eyes, with those lines that come to one who has lived much in the open and much in jeopardy. His eyes likewise were dark and wore an expression of habitual unconcern. But behind this veil of indifference lurked a tired look, an expression of utter weariness, as if he had plumbed the depths of living and decided the game was scarcely worth the candle.

He introduced himself gravely. "My name, sir," he said, and his slurred accent told that he was born not a great way from the Roanoke, "is Jackson Lee. I have a few cattle, and a horse or two, down along the border in the next county. Just to-day, while I was in Coceice, I heard you had a thoroughbred over here. So, sir, I took the liberty of ridin' on in hopes of seein' her."

Old Shamus was attracted, yet in a manner repelled, by this visitor. He as yet knew little of the West or Westerners, and still less of gunmen. As might be expected, during a lifetime spent about the tracks, he had rubbed shoulders with men of violence; but these were men of flying fists and raucous talk. This was his first meeting with one to whom firearms were a natural weapon.

However, old Shamus made no attempt to analyze his feelings. In fact he hardly gave them a second thought, so glad was he of company.

"Faith and it'll be a pleasure to show ye our filly," he said cordially. "And if, after that, ye'll stay to lunch, ye can see the filly step."

On the way to the barn, old Shamus began his usual dissertation concerning the desirability of Firefly's blood lines. Jack Lee heard him through, without interruption. Then, very gently and very courteously, he ventured to air his own opinion: "A strong trace of the Herod blood your filly bears, sir. And Herod, if the records are to be believed, was a blood bay of most uncertain temper. 'Tis a trait that's apt to crop out at unexpected moments I was taught. Personally, I prefer Eclipse as a fountainhead. As a strain, his descendants are more inclined to quietness and, in my opinion, sir, are equally as fast."

A puff would have floored old Shamus just then. For he had had no knowledge and even less suspicion that this dark-haired, soft-voiced, drawling stranger comprehended in the slightest the intricate

ramifications of any thoroughbred's pedigree. To other visitors, the filly had been just "hoss" until he enlightened them.

"Sure, 'tis an unexpected pleasure," he boomed, "to meet a student of form and lineage, even if our opinions do differ. I take it ye have followed the tracks a bit."

"You take it wrong then, sir," said Jack Lee soberly. "I was born in Virginia and my father was a horseman. His beliefs are my beliefs. My experience with thoroughbreds is limited to one."

Old Shamus chuckled throatily. "By the great rock of Cashan, then ye're due to see number two. Look ye, Mister Lee!"

Flinging open a stable door which gave ingress into a small corral, Shamus literally shooed Firefly into the pen. He was taking no chances with either the capricious maiden's heels or teeth.

Firefly was in a villainous temper this day, which the sound of old Shamus' voice did not improve. For he was her pet aversion, and she never missed an opportunity to display her dislike of him. So she pranced out of the stall, her ears laid back, her eyes rolling, and her tail erect.

What a picture she made, this wayward, self-willed daughter of King Midas. Her coat was the red of a robin's breast in springtime, her eyes glowed ruby, hot with the desire to either race or battle. And so lightly did she tread, she seemed almost to float. Now there is an old saying among horsemen that temper is an infallible indication of dauntless courage. If this is so, there was no disputing the fact that Firefly possessed a lion's heart.

For long minutes, Jack Lee studied her, commencing at the granite-hard hoofs, designed by nature to withstand impacts that would shatter a draft animal's hoofs to splinters, and ending at the flickering ears which are an infallible barometer of equine thought and feeling.

When he had concluded, there was appreciation, and esteem, and a deal of sympathetic understanding in his eyes. Jack Lee comprehended fully the restlessness of spirit that fathered Firefly's bursts of rage. For he was also born with an unsettled soul and the restless craving that urges a man headlong in search of adventure and violence.

"You have, there," he remarked presently, with quiet conviction, "the prettiest filly I ever set eyes on."

"And that ye shall," old Shamus agreed heartily. "First we'll have lunch and then my daughter will show ye what the filly can do."

Jack Lee's first sight of Nora O'Sherry came in the subdued light of the living room with the shades pulled low against the glaring midday sun; so Nora was not aware of the sudden light of surprise and wonder that crept into his eyes. Nor was there any break in his slow, smooth drawl to indicate he was shaken to the very depths by a new something that came into his life at sight of her.

The three chatted until lunch was served, and then, a short time later, went to the barn where Nora prepared Firefly for her customary afternoon work-out. She ran against the watch, and Jack Lee observed the trial with intense interest. He made no comment at the moment, but just before saying farewell he sprung a surprise on Shamus.

"I would like to visit you again," he said, "and bring a filly I call Desert Girl to run her against this Firefly of yours. But Desert Girl has never been in trainin', so first I would have to get her hardened up. She is a thoroughbred, and from her look and conformation I should say she carries the blood lines of Eclipse. I have no knowledge of her pedigree though. The man I got her off is dead."

"But, my boy, ye can easy trace it!" declared old Shamus showing some excitement.

"No, sir, it would be impossible," Jack Lee declared in a tone of absolute finality. He did not trouble to explain that Desert Girl was a waif filly when she came into his hands, one of a band of thoroughbreds pillaged from some border racing stable. For in that case he might have found it necessary to explain that he had killed the revolutionist who had claimed her. And Jack Lee preferred not to talk of such things.

"I'll be shovin' on toward home," he said, "but I will come again, sir, as soon as I can make the time."

It was some ten days afterward, late in the afternoon, when Jack Lee, appeared again. Old Shamus never dreamed he had made a detour of many weary miles from sheer longing to gaze on a certain piquant face crowned by a mass of glowing hair, and to look again into a pair of eyes like the cool green depths of a Killarney lake

when the gold of a setting sun rests on it, in late afternoon.

"My outfit is at work yonder across the desert," he told old Shamus casually. "So I thought I would jog over to tell you that I have put Desert Girl in trainin'. Maybe, sir, before long, we can test Herod blood against Eclipse."

Duty cut Jack Lee's stay short, and sunset found him again riding into the desert. Possibly because she read aright the pleading in his eyes, Nora accompanied him a short distance. What they talked of does not greatly matter. But when they said good-by, dusk had fallen, and the lights of the O'Sherry ranch house in the distance were twinkling like clustered stars.

Now to fully comprehend the way old Shamus felt, and to ascribe a motive for the events which followed, you must understand that he was utterly homesick for the atmosphere of track and stable. In consequence, the mere thought of racing Firefly against another thoroughbred exercised a great appeal and set his imagination working.

"Sure, Gorgeous, if this black-haired lad's filly shows any class at all, we'll arrange to hold the race in Coceice," he confided the next day. "'Tis a sporting town, if I'm not mistaken, and they'd appreciate the match."

And the more he considered this idea, the more enthused old Shamus became. So, a few nights later, he broached the subject to a visitor from Coceice.

He was a man named Bascom, a storekeeper, who of late had been coming regularly to the ranch. Now Bascom did not care a snap for horses or for racing, so he and old Shamus had nothing in common. Nora was the magnet that drew him hither. But, long since, she had privately decided this particular suitor was not much of a man. And her opinion was borne out shortly.

Bascom heard old Shamus through. The town would welcome such an event he agreed. "But I must say Jack Lee has his nerve, thrusting himself on people like yourself—and your daughter."

Old Shamus' shaggy brows lifted. "Spit it out, sir!" he said bluntly. "If the man's a crook, then, with horses, I'll have none of him!"

Bascom shrugged. "I'd hardly go as far as to say that," he hedged, but there was a nasty undertone which implied he was making the assertion against his better judgment. "Jack's a hard character, however, a killer and an all-round undesirable. He has fought the length and breadth of Mexico, first on one side and then on the other, as I see it, for the sheer lust of killing. He owns a ranch south of here along the border. That makes it handy for him to——" and Bascom launched into a long series of tales concerning Jake Lee, in none of which was there a single grain of truth.

Just what actuated the storekeeper to do this, is not easily determined. Bascom, in his heart, admired Jack Lee. He was just the sort of man the storekeeper would have liked to be himself, had he possessed the requisite courage. And this envy, as is ofttimes the case, blossomed into bitter-tongued jealousy. Behind his back, Bascom could not say enough belittling things about Jack Lee.

However, Shamus O'Sherry, who was the soul of honesty himself, had no suspicion but what Bascom had told the gospel truth. In consequence, a little tug of worry pulled at his heart. For Shamus knew his daughter far better than most fathers know their children; and he shrewdly suspected, since Jack Lee's advent, that a strange, new something, as yet entirely unsuspected by herself, had entered Nora's life.

He met Jack Lee at the gate when the ranchman rode up a few days later and conducted him to the barn. There, in detail, he made known his plans for holding the race in Coceice.

When he had concluded, Jack Lee nodded. "If you would prefer it that way," he agreed, "I'll be happy to oblige you. And my opinion is, sir, if Desert Girl clips a few more seconds from her time, she'll take your filly's measure."

Now Shamus O'Sherry, like most big-hearted men, was a clumsy conspirator. But after much concentrated thought, he had evolved a plan to rid Nora and himself of Jack Lee's presence, and still leave no bitter feelings. And, in believing this scheme would work, he unknowingly paid the highest tribute possible to Jack Lee's honor and integrity.

"Well, with the race arranged, how about a bet?" he asked.

Jack Lee smiled as he shook his head. "I never bet with friends," he replied.

"If they want my money, they are welcome to it."

Thereupon, nerving himself to the effort, old Shamus took the plunge. "'Tis not your money I am after takin'," he explained, with a trace of apology in his tones. "I'm only tryin' to be a fair man and a sportin' one. Here is the wager I would make. If Firefly wins, ye are to go your way, and niver attempt to see me nor mine again. If your filly wins, then I'll say no word against your comin' here. 'Tis Gorgeous' welfare I'm thinkin' of, lad," he ended, in an unintentional burst of confidence.

For a moment, Jack Lee stood like one stricken, a look of utter agony on his face. "Some one has been tellin' you tales about me?" he asked, and far back in his eyes there was the look of a hurt child.

Old Shamus passed the direct question. "Nora is very dear to me, and I would not see her make a mistake," he explained. "'Tis my feeling things should stop where they are. But I am a fair man, so I am offering you a sportin' chance."

"You know I love her then?" asked Jack Lee gently.

Old Shamus inclined his head.

Jack Lee paused in thought. No one but those who have worn the mantle of a gunman or a killer can begin to realize the absolute insincerity by which they are constantly surrounded. Men and women alike laud and defer to them when face to face. But behind their backs, false tales and slyly worded innuendoes are continually being spread. Their every act is given some sinister twist, old deeds are elaborated on in an unkind way, and thus an ugly reputation is built up around them. All of which is utterly and absolutely unjust.

Jack Lee considered this. Some busybody, he reflected, had been at work, poisoning old Shamus' mind against him. This thought was followed by another: "If the father felt this way, why not the daughter?" And this thought struck him forcibly.

Thereupon the boyish impulsiveness which was one of Jack Lee's chiefest charms and which had led him into most of his serious escapades, came to the fore.

"Oh, well," he said with a shrug, although his heart felt like ice, "I'll accept your proposition. After all, a race is

*Blue spurts of smoke shot upward, and the staccato bark of six-shooters split the air; loyal to a man, the West pulling for its own.*

hardly a race without a bet between owners."

Thus were the stakes agreed on, and, after determining the date for the running, Jack Lee took his departure. Through old Shamus' careful maneuvering, he failed to catch even a glimpse of Nora, and, wrongfully, he ascribed this to her own desire.

Without stating the reason to any living soul, he took Desert Girl out of training. While he was willing to humor old Shamus to the extent of holding the race, he did not intend Desert Girl should win—not now. Jack Lee owned a hot pride that would never allow him to inflict his presence where it was not desired.

There was, it seemed, a vague rumor, afloat in Coceice the morning before the race, regarding some huge private bet between the owners of the respective horses. How this started, it is impossible to say, unless perhaps some incautious word dropped by old Shamus had been misinterpreted. Nevertheless, the report persisted, and the simple fact that neither denial or confirmation could be obtained from either man, served to stimulate belief in its authenticity.

Since the previous day, singly and in little groups, riders had been filtering into Coceice from all points of the compass. Desert-burned cowboys mingled with the hill men, and, from Jack Lee's neighborhood, south, came a group of hawk-eyed, reckless-appearing fellows with huge sums in gold. This they dumped on a blanket in the middle of the plaza, and, after appointing one of their number as guard, went about imploring some group of Firefly backers to cover it.

Firefly had been brought in early that same morning as old Shamus wished her to become accustomed, so far as possible, to her temporary quarters.

The evening shadows were lengthening, when Jack Lee appeared with Desert Girl. He came riding slowly down Main Street in company with one other man, leading Desert Girl behind. His companion was small and spare, well past the prime of life, with a seamed face and extraordinarily long arms that ended in a pair of hands as white and well kept as a woman's. He wore on either hip a battered scabbard, from which, the guns had been removed, but an irregular lump, showing through the slicker tied to the cantle of his saddle, advertised the fact that they had not been left behind. His appearance created a sensation.

*"El Tigre,"* the Mexican residents of the town murmured, and averted their eyes as he passed. Those among the gringos who knew him greeted him civilly, calling him "Tiger" Wayne.

Coceice spent a hilarious night, nor was there much let-up when day broke. Betting increased in volume and intensity, and talk of a huge side wager between the two principals became universal. Word of this reached Nora O'Sherry's ears through a casual remark dropped by a group of midmorning visitors to Firefly's stable. It gave her a sickening shock; for Nora never till then had dreamed the race was matched in anything but a spirit of friendly rivalry. Even yet she doubted it. Old Shamus, she knew, was not a betting man notwithstanding the fact that his life was bound up with horse racing. He considered breeding and racing of thoroughbreds as an exact science in which the vindication of his theories was sufficient reward; he had been content to leave to others, the excitement of the betting ring. But Nora instinctively felt there must be a grain of truth in the rumor. So, a little troubled, she sought her father.

When she put the question, old Shamus lied grandly, like a true Irish gentleman and a man whose only thought was for his daughter's welfare.

"Sure, Gorgeous, honey, I haven't bet one lone nickel with Mr. Lee or any one else," he affirmed. "'Tis some fairy tale ye've been overhearin', dear."

There was, however, an unconvincing ring in his tones, and, being his own flesh and blood, she comprehended to the last degree his stubbornness. Providing he really had something he wished to conceal from her, she would make no headway by further questioning. A bit sick at heart, Nora pondered over the situation for a full half hour. Then, alone, she left Firefly's quarters and set out in search of Jackson Lee.

She found him at the opposite end of the small town, where he had established camp in a small group of cottonwoods. In direct contrast to the ornate quarters rigged up for Firefly, there was an elemental simplicity here. A half dozen lariats had been stretched from tree to

tree to form a small inclosure. There, Desert Lady, together with her two companion horses, was penned. A short stone's throw away, by the embers of a burned-out fire, lay El Tigre, dozing on a pile of blankets like some somnolent animal. With his back against a tree, Jack Lee sat gazing pensively into vacancy.

And then Jack Lee rose to meet her, and the depths of pain she saw behind the gleam of welcome in his eyes, caused her to catch her breath and forget entirely her carefully rehearsed speech of greeting.

"I—I decided," she began rather haltingly, "that since you neglected to visit us, I would come over and call on you."

"That makes me very happy, ma'am," Jack assured her gravely. "I have been wonderin' all the mornin' how you folks were makin' out."

Nora's heartbeats dropped to normal. The man's disarming air of casual politeness was just what was needed to restore her grip. So, without further preamble, she related the reason for her visit.

"It is not because I object to a bet between you and dad," she explained, "providing, of course, there is such a bet. Rather it is the fact I have been kept in the dark that hurts. Dad's so indefinite I have come to you for the truth. You'll tell me, won't you?"

A sudden strained look, as if some inner pain had gripped him, showed itself on Jack Lee's face. "I have never lied to a woman yet," he told her gently, "and I sure don't aim to commence with you. But I thought you knew about it."

"Then there is a bet?" demanded Nora.

"Yes, ma'am," affirmed Jack Lee.

"Tell me," urged Nora.

"It's only fair, ma'am," he admitted quietly. "But first I will have to say a word about myself. I have lived a right wild life, that is so far as shootin' and adventure goes. I will not say it was necessary or justified, for I might have stayed north of the border or, better yet, in Virginia where I was born. But I did not, and that is that.

"Your father, and I can hardly blame him, does not care to have me know you any better. So we made this wager; if your filly wins, I go away from here; but if Desert Girl wins, then I stay, and can come and call whenever it is possible. That is all, ma'am. Myself, I would hardly call it a bet—more of an agreement."

With a suddenness that left her gasping, Nora O'Sherry realized she did not want this man to go out of her life; that no matter what should happen, she desired him to be a part of it, always. And, being essentially a woman, she could not forgo asking softly: "Do you really want to win?"

Jack Lee hesitated while he groped for words. "I wanted more than anything else in the world to win when the wager was first proposed," he at length explained. "But afterward, I decided you probably had agreed to your dad's proposition, and, that bein' the case, I had no desire to win. So I took Desert Girl out of trainin'. Since then, I have been tryin' to accustom myself to the thought I must leave this country."

"And go where?" Nora asked.

"Somewhere south of the border, ma'am. There, in time, perhaps I can forget."

An exquisitely sharp pain stabbed Nora O'Sherry's throat, and she hastened to change the subject. "Are you going to ride Desert Girl yourself?" she asked.

"No," Jack Lee told her. "I am too heavy, but when I learned you were to ride Firefly, I brought El Tigre, that man yonder, along to ride for me. For, notwithstanding I have spread the word that Desert Girl stands no chance, there will be much betting. And in that case, it is always possible an outsider might be tempted to put over something crooked while the race is bein' run. But with El Tigre in the saddle, no man would try, for, in that case, his life would not be worth a straw. Please understand, I am doin' this because I want you to be safe."

"I understand," said Nora softly, "and I thank you. Now will you promise me this; providing Desert Girl does win, will you hold dad to his wager?"

"Surely, ma'am, if you wish it," Jack Lee answered, his heart beginning to pound. "But there is no chance of such a thing—not now."

"Well, one never can tell," said Nora, an enigmatical smile on her face as she turned away.

At a quarter of two that afternoon, Nora O'Sherry, dressed in the O'Sherry colors of green and gold, went to Firefly's stall. Old Shamus accompanied her, but

he did not go within. First Nora saddled the filly, who, though surcharged with excitement, was unusually tractable and gentle. The saddling completed, she next unraveled a triple strand of golden silk, from a rosette sewed to her long-visored cap, and dropped to her knees. Quite a period passed which was punctuated by restless stamping on the part of Firefly and little soothing endearments uttered by Nora. So long a time it was, that old Shamus, waiting impatiently outside, became troubled and called to her.

"Coming, dad," she answered, with a lilt in her voice, and presently she led Firefly outside.

It was but a short way to where an eight-furlong oval had been crudely staked off, at the town's outskirts. Apparently the entire country had turned out, for a solid throng surrounded the oval.

Nora halted beside the temporary stand which had been erected for the judges' use, while she awaited the call to the wire. Firefly, hedged closer with humanity than she had ever been before, behaved like a perfect lady. She was taut as a violin string, and her eyes glowed red with the thoroughbred's desire to battle. The only pronounced indication of restlessness was a constant endeavor to reach her head down toward her right fetlock.

At the opposite side of the wire, El Tigre stood beside Desert Girl, a morose, solitary figure of a man, even in a crowd. His green-gray eyes flamed with a cold light of excitement, and he replied in monosyllabic grunts to occasional questions thrown his way.

Presently the horses were called to the post, and the judge issued his instructions: "Play fair, ride out your horse, and may the best one win," he said curtly.

Have you ever seen red lightning flash from a cloudless sky? No? Well, neither have I. But those who were fortunate enough to be at the post that afternoon can say they have. For Firefly, at the crack of the starter's pistol, left the wire like a flaming ruby streak. By four lengths she led at the completion of one furlong, four lengths she gained before the poorly trained Desert Girl settled down to run. But there, Desert Girl clung with the tenacious determination of a terrier. Firefly could not gain another inch.

Four furlongs! Six furlongs! The last turn was negotiated, and still their positions remained unchanged. "Firefly! Firefly!" The call of the crowd became a concerted roar. Nothing alive and on four legs could overtake the carmine catapult it seemed. But just as they entered the stretch, the red filly hesitated perceptibly, and, with a rush, Desert Girl moved up.

Only a length now separated them. Firefly was favoring her right front foot, seeming to have but partial control over it. For, with each impact, the hoof appeared to slide, and it cost her an effort to wrench it from the ground.

Sensing this, the crowd instantly changed its cry. "Desert Girl! Desert Girl!" The volume grew and swelled to thrice its former proportions. Blue spurts of smoke shot upward, and the staccato bark of six-shooters rippled like machine-gun fire around the oval. Loyal to a man, the West was now pulling for its own.

Onward they came! The red filly was gamely battling that invisible something that seemed to drag like a leech at her foot. Goaded into a state of frenzy by the steady tattoo of El Tigre's whip and the mad roar of the crowd, Desert Girl ran like an insane thing. There was no denying her. Yards, feet, inches! Inexorably, she closed the gap. Fifty feet to go and they were nose and nose; and at the wire, a black muzzle was an inch in front. Desert Girl had won!

Nora O'Sherry did not go back to the judges' stand after stopping her horse. For now that the race was over, a growing feeling of alarm assailed her. She realized, only too well, that among that entire crowd there would be one at least with a knowledge of what she had done. And that one would be her father.

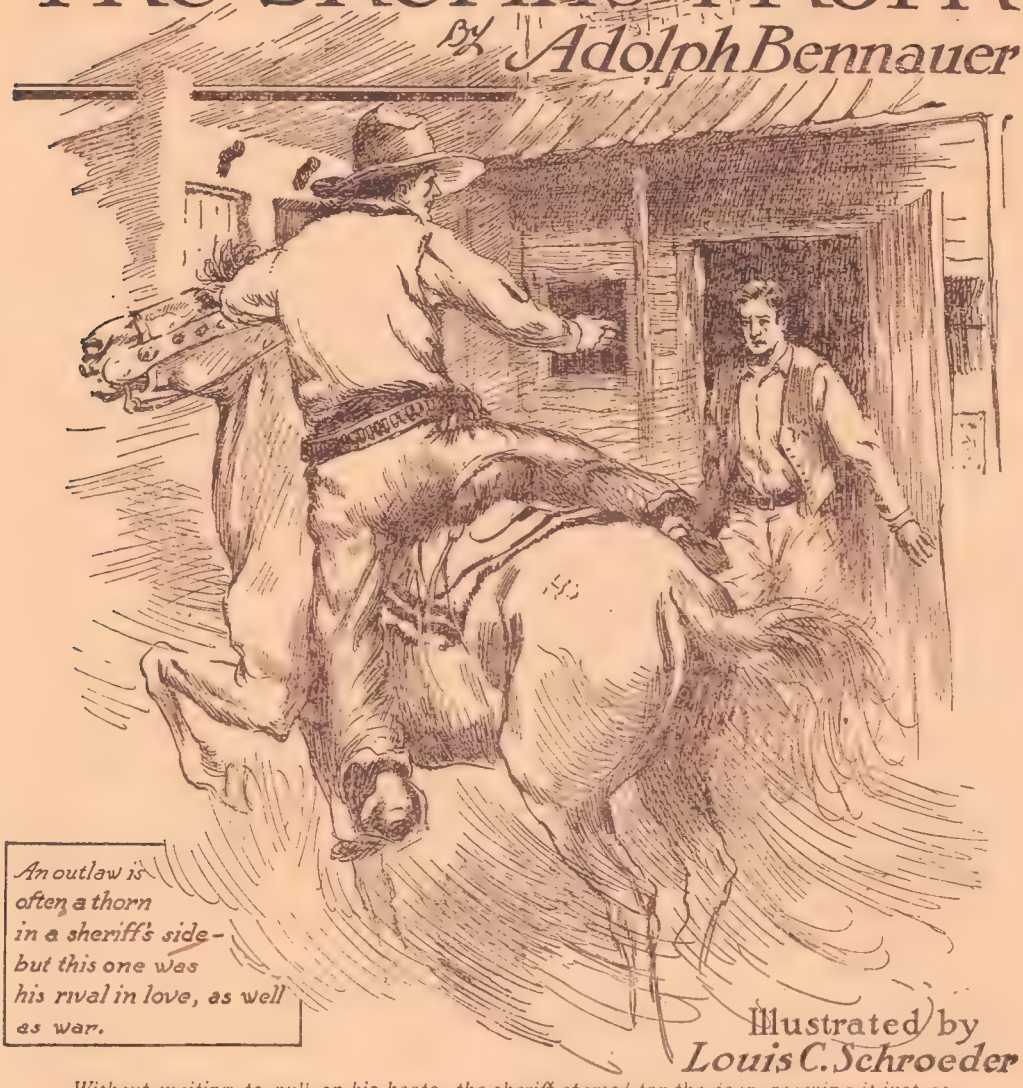
So Nora rode directly to the stable, with the idea of postponing the inevitable as long as possible. There she unsaddled Firefly and next, bending down, unloosened the three-ply silken cord, tied tightly just above the hoof. Firefly nickered her relief as the returning blood drove the numbness from her foot.

A slight cough caused Nora to look up. Peering into the stall, she saw her father. But instead of wrath, there was a look of understanding love on old Shamus' face.

"Sure, Gorgeous, honey," he said huskily, when she joined him, "I did not know ye loved that black-haired lad so much. It's all right with me, girl."

# The Sheriff's Thorn

By Adolph Bennauer



*An outlaw is often a thorn in a sheriff's side—but this one was his rival in love, as well as war.*

Illustrated by Louis C. Schroeder

*Without waiting to pull on his boots, the sheriff started for the door, reaching it just as the strange rider drew up.*

WITHOUT any intention of eavesdropping, Sheriff Holloway had paused in front of the Ace High Saloon. No man in Crocker City abhorred the practice of eavesdropping more than he; it was simply that the vacant bench in the darkened area beside the open door offered him a convenient place to rest, while he awaited the town's nightly event—the arrival of the stage from Yellow Dog. Yet, as he sat there, a snatch of conversation reached him from a group of men at the near end of the bar, which impelled him to listen in spite of himself.

"You can't hardly tell," some one was saying. "Sometimes I think it'll be Dave Holloway, and sometimes I'm just as sure it'll be Bob Melford. There ain't no understandin' the ways of women, and me, I'd sooner put my money on a horse, sight unseen, than to bet which one of them hombres wins Gail Starling!"

There was a general laugh of approval.

"Still," protested another, whom Hollo-

way recognized as "Slim" Daley, one of his deputies, "Gail is a right sensible gal, and, if I ain't missin' my guess, she'll pick the sheriff. Aside from his holdin' down the biggest job in the county, he's the squarest, finest, most upstandin' young fellow I ever met. Of course, Melford seems to be shootin' pretty square right now, too, or the gal's uncle would never keep him on at the Cross Circle as foreman, but you can't overlook the fact that his past ain't exactly what it ought to have been."

"Oh, I don't know," a third man interposed. "Melford's past ain't hurtin' him none with Gail. Even the most sensible of women likes romance, and there's sure romance aplenty in the thought of an ex-bandit tryin' to come back. Besides, Bob is young, and handsome, and he's got them dashin' ways that appeals to all women. If I was bettin' at all, which I ain't, I believe I'd put my money on the foreman."

A short silence ensued, during which the sheriff felt his cheeks go red; then came the sound of three glasses being pushed back across the bar.

"Well," declared the first man with an air of finality, "no matter which one of 'em gets the gal, he ain't goin' to fall heir to no great fortune! The Cross Circle ain't half the ranch she was three years ago, as you all know. Between bad speculations and two seasons of drought, old Ed Starling has been hit pretty hard." He lowered his voice slightly. "I heard he was at the bank yesterday, tryin' to negotiate another loan!"

"That so? Did he get it?"

"Not so you could notice it!" was the emphatic reply. "Seems he's already mortgaged the ranch to the hilt, and Spencer told him he wasn't runnin' his bank on sentiment. Too bad, too, because there never was a finer scout than old Ed Starling! But maybe he'll pull through, somehow. There's three empty chairs at a poker table! Suppose we set in till the stage gets here!"

With one accord, the group moved off, leaving behind them only the confused babble of the more distant occupants of the room. And with no slight feeling of chagrin, Sheriff Holloway arose and moved away, also. Like most eavesdroppers, he was not any too pleased at what he had overheard. Not until now, did he realize that his ardent courtship of Gail Starling was such common property, or that Bob Melford was to be considered such a dangerous rival. With a lover's fond fancy, he had heretofore imagined that he was as secure in Miss Starling's affections as she was in his. But these men were in a position to view the matter in a more open light. And perhaps they were right!

For the first time in his life, Dave Holloway felt the pangs of jealousy. To think that Gail should be interested in Bob Melford, of all men! A few years before, the latter had been the leader of a gang of long riders, who, if they confined their depredations to the rich, and avoided killings, were at least legal outlaws. The turning point in his career had come when he had clashed with "Frisco Pete," leader of the most notorious band of killers that ever infested the border. In that clash, brought on by Frisco Pete's professional jealousy, Melford's gang had virtually wiped out the other, killing the leader and all but three of his followers. In recognition of this service, the governor had offered to pardon Melford's gang if they would come in and give themselves up. For the most part, the gang had preferred to keep their freedom, and now, under a new leader, they were continuing their depredations across the State line. But Melford had come in.

From that time on, his rise to grace had been rapid. Taking advantage of an offer from Ed Starling, who was in need of good riders and men who could shoot well, if necessary, he had joined the Cross Circle as a top hand. A year later, having evidenced his sincerity to "come back" beyond all question, he had been made foreman, and, surely, no man ever held down that job more efficiently. His honesty, his diligence, his unfailing good nature, soon earned him the respect and admiration of every man in Crocker City, and never, until to-night, had any one mentioned his past. He had come to be accepted just as he was, a gay and likable young fellow. And if he had thus won the admiration of the men, might it not be possible that he had won the admiration of the women, also?

"I've been a fool," the sheriff told himself warmly. "Of *course*, there's something more than friendship between Gail and Bob Melford! Wasn't it she that induced her uncle to hire him? Wanted to give him a chance, she said, but how do I know her reason wasn't deeper than that?

If it was, I'm standin' a mighty poor show of winnin' her, with Melford seein' her every day! I ain't aimin' to play second fiddle to nobody, and I reckon I've been courtin' her long enough to find out just where I stand! If I can get away, I'll go out to the Cross Circle, and pop the question the first thing in the morning!"

Thus did the pangs of jealousy inspire Holloway to commit an act which he had been contemplating, but dreading, for almost a year. And once this inspiration had seized him, he felt that he could not wait till morning. The thought that Melford might be courting the girl at that very moment was torture to him. He recalled the remark he had overheard at the Ace High Saloon, that whoever won the girl would not inherit any great fortune; he snorted his contempt at the memory of it. He already had enough money for his needs, and what man would want more if he had Gail Starling! In all the world there was no other girl like Gail, who could ride and rope as well as any man, yet who retained all the beauty, and the sweetness, and the tenderness of a woman.

"I sure feel sorry for her uncle," Holloway mused, "because it's a fact that he's plumb up against it. But as far as Gail is concerned, it wouldn't make any difference to me if he was a pauper. And I'll say this much for Bob Melford—he feels the same way about it!"

Absorbed in his reflections, he was not aware that he had passed beyond the town's precincts, until he was attracted by a commotion behind him. Turning, he discovered that the stage from Yellow Dog was just pulling into the other end of town. And, simultaneously, he awoke to startled attention. Ordinarily a most conservative driver, old Jeff Bates was now swinging into the street on two wheels, the four rangy blacks stretched out into a gallop under the persistent lash of his whip. A hasty calculation convinced the sheriff that he was not late enough to warrant such an action. Then what could be the trouble? Realizing that there was only one way of finding out, he started for the depot on the run.

Even before he reached the place, he had guessed the answer, for Jeff Bates, rising to bring his team to a halt, suddenly let out a yell that carried all over town.

"Hi, you-all! Grab your horseflesh and git ready for action!"

Of all the startled citizens who immediately poured forth from the doorways, Holloway was the first to reach him.

"What do you mean, Bates?" he snapped. "You been held up?"

The driver had now tossed the reins aside and was clambering down from his precarious perch.

"No," he roared, his round, florid face purple with emotion. "If there'd been a whole gang of 'em, I might have called it a holdup, but to be stopped by one lone man is just an insult!"

There was a chorus of exclamations from the crowd.

"One man?" echoed Holloway, seizing him excitedly by the shoulder. "When? Where? What did he get away with?"

Jeff Bates pulled free and held up a protesting hand, as his three passengers, frightened, no doubt, as much by that terrific ride as anything else, emerged timidly from the interior of the vehicle.

"One thing at a time, sheriff," he requested. "And you'll get the story straighter if you let me tell it my own way. But to ease your mind, I'll answer your last question first and state that this hombre didn't get away with nothin'! It's the principle of the thing that I'm ravin' about! To think that an old leather-pusher like me, who has shot his way out of more tight places than he's got fingers and toes, should be stopped by one lone man!" He snorted in disgust.

"It happened about two hours ago," he went on, "just as I reached the top of the grade in Coyote Pass. As usual, I'd stopped to rest the blacks a bit, when all of a sudden a gent rode out from behind a boulder and told me to stick 'em up! It was about eight o'clock, then, and mighty dark in the pass, and he was wearin' a mask besides, so it was impossible for me to make out who he was. I don't even know what kind of horse he rode, I was so excited. I didn't argue with him none, because I figured that his wasn't the only gun that was trained on me. I'd picked up a thirty-thousand-dollar consignment of dust at the Ophir mines, and I figured that this gent and his gang knew about the shipment beforehand, and was layin' for me! So when he ordered me to get down and break out the strong box, I didn't hesitate to obey that command, either!

"But here's where the big surprise comes in!" said Jeff excitedly. "Just as I was

climbin' down from my seat, another rider came gallopin' into the pass from the west. I knew he wasn't one of the gang, because he started throwin' lead, the minute he hove in sight. Right away, the stick-up gent dug in his spurs and beat it, and then I saw there wasn't anybody in the gang but himself! The other gent yelled at me to start rollin', and took after him, and, realizin' that I couldn't do any good in a runnin' fight, I acted on that advice. Who that other gent was, I don't know, any more than the rest of you, because he came and went so sudden that I hardly got a look at him. But he was sure one game hombre, and if he ain't had any bad luck, I'll bet he's got his man by now!"

There were no interruptions during this rather lengthy recital, but at its conclusion, the crowd broke out into a perfect babble of excited comment. All save Sheriff Holloway, who, in such dramatic moments as this, could be trusted to remain as calm and alert as ever. His eyes, sweeping the sea of faces about him, lighted upon those of two of his deputies.

"Daley! Carr!" he called sharply. "Grab your horses and get ready to ride! No tellin' how that chase may turn out, with them two so evenly matched! Besides, it's our duty to go after all stick-up gents, whether they get away with the goods or not!"

Excited as his two associates had been a moment before, his crisp voice brought them instantly into action. No time was lost in securing their horses, which were always standing waiting, and a few moments later, the three men were in the saddle and streaking out of town in the direction of Coyote Pass.

It was then almost ten o'clock. Yet conditions for pursuit were, if anything more favorable than they would have been a few hours previous; for a gibbous moon, just clearing the mountaintops to the eastward, bathed the land in a flood of silvery light, enabling the posse to put their horses to their best. It also enabled them to dispense with the long, roundabout trail, and to take a short cut to the pass, for, since the bandit had fled eastward on leaving that point, they were spared the necessity of looking for him on this side of it. It was evident that he was heading for the State line, which lay about twenty miles beyond the pass, and their only concern was to overtake him before he reached there. Not only did that line present a legal barrier, but it ran through a stretch of country so wild and rugged that it would have permitted the fugitive to laugh at a hundred posses.

As he rode, the sheriff could not help pondering upon the strangeness of this holdup. Not since his first year in office, had Crocker County suffered such an indignity, much less at the hands of one man. He agreed with Jeff Bates that this fellow must have had advance information of the gold shipment or he would never have taken such a risk, single-handed. The Ophir mines were located about ten miles this side of the State line, and, although such shipments were made from them frequently, they were so irregular, that very few people, not even excepting Holloway himself, knew of them. This convinced him that the bandit was either an employee of the mining company or was intimately acquainted with some one who was.

"That's one clew to go on," he assured himself grimly, "in case we have to use it. But I don't reckon we will. If that other gent is half as good as he seems to be, he ought to have stopped his man by now!"

An hour and a half later, the posse reached Coyote Pass and swung into the trail that led to the Ophir mines and Yellow Dog. From then on, they rode more cautiously, scanning the country on each side of them, and hoping, every time they topped a rise, to catch a glimpse of the bandit or his pursuer. But as the miles sped by without result, this hope became replaced by a growing uneasiness. Was the stranger still following his man, or had he given up the chase and turned back? In either case, they had no alternative but to keep on, pushing and resting their horses by turns. A little after one o'clock, they passed the Ophir mines, looming silent and ghostlike in the moonlight, still with no sight of their quarry. And in the gray of false dawn they came, at last, to the State line—to realize that all their efforts had been fruitless!

The fatigue of that long ride had done nothing to improve the sheriff's temper, but he was too much the leader to betray his real feelings to his men.

"Well, boys, we lost," he declared philosophically, "so the only thing we can do is to go back to town and forget about it. Too bad Bates didn't get a better look at that hombre! The company is offerin' a

standin' reward of one thousand dollars for the conviction of anybody who holds up their stages, and if we could post this fellow's description, somebody might pick him up when he drifted across the line again. As it is, I reckon we'll have to consider that he was just a little too slick for us and let it go at that!"

There was no answer to this argument. Silently, the little posse wheeled their horses about and started back for Crocker City. But "Slim" Daley, at least, could not remain silent for long.

"Darned funny thing about that other gent, though," he broke out impulsively. "To hear Jeff Bates talk, you'd think he was a regular hellbender! To my mind he was just a quitter. Already within gun-shot of his man, he gets cold feet and turns back before we reach the pass!"

Holloway had been thinking much the same thing.

"I guess he turned back, all right," he admitted, "but I ain't so sure that it was on account of cold feet. Maybe the stick-up gent had so much the better horse that he saw it was plumb foolish to try to overtake him. But I'm sure anxious to learn who he was," he added. "He might be able to give us some pointers on our man that'll be of real advantage."

His companions could throw no light on that matter, however, and the remainder of the trip was made in silence.

Due to the jaded condition of their mounts, the posse rode very slowly now, and it was well into the forenoon before they arrived at Crocker City. Their first act on reaching there was to head for the livery stable, where their horses would immediately be taken care of. But no sooner had they appeared upon the street, than

*A few moments later, the three men were in the saddle and streaking out of town in the direction of Coyote Pass.*

they were observed and besieged by a crowd of eager citizens, who had evidently been waiting up all night for their return. Not any too well pleased at his ill luck, Holloway explained the situation briefly to them and attempted to pass on. In that act, however, he was halted by the proprietor of the Ace High Saloon, who stepped forward and laid a hand upon his rein.

"You say you didn't run across anybody?" he demanded. "Then you don't know about Ed Starling?"

The sheriff's face revealed his surprise

"You mean Ed Starling of the Cross Circle? What's he got to do with this?"

The answer came in a perfect chorus.

"Why, Starling's the one that went after that stick-up gent!"

It was a question as to which one of the posse was the most astonished. Perhaps the last person in the world they had suspected that unknown individual of being was the owner of the Cross Circle. The fact that it *was* he disproved absolutely Slim Daley's belief that the man had turned back on account of cold feet. For, despite his fifty-odd years, there was no gamer fighter in Crocker County than old Ed Starling. Nor was there any man who ever went better mounted. The realization of this caused the sheriff's astonishment to change to a frown of perplexity.

"How did Starling happen to be out at Coyote Pass at that time of night?" he demanded. "And if it was him, I don't see why in thunder——"

"That's what I'm aimin' to tell you," the saloon keeper interrupted quickly. "About two hours after you left, a couple of punchers rode in from the Cross Circle, lookin' for 'Doc' Talbot, and they told us all about it. Seems that Starling had been out at the pass, huntin' for some strays, and was just startin' back when he saw that gent ride out and stick Jeff Bates up! Then he followed the gent, like Bates said, but before he could get near enough to see who he was, the fellow turned and let him have a slug between the ribs! Of course, he couldn't keep on after that; it was all he could do to make it back to the ranch! The punchers said he seemed in mighty bad shape when they left him; and I guess he was, because Doc Talbot ain't got back yet!"

Here was a situation calculated to startle Dave Holloway, indeed! This was the morning, he remembered, on which he had planned to ride out to the Cross Circle Ranch and ask Gail Starling to become his wife! With her uncle lying seriously wounded, such a plan was now utterly out of the question. His chagrin at this thought, however, was as nothing, compared to his concern for Starling, himself. It seemed as if the old cattleman already had troubles enough, without suffering this additional misfortune. Besides, he and Holloway had always been the closest of friends, and the latter felt a keen personal injury at his friend's plight. He was determined, now, to bring this unknown bandit to justice at any cost. He wheeled upon the saloon keeper sharply.

"You mean to say he couldn't give the boys any idea who that stick-up gent was?" he demanded.

The other shook his head regretfully.

"Seems it was pretty dark, and he didn't get near enough, Holloway! Besides, the fellow was wearin' a mask. But, whoever he is, he must be mighty handy with a gun. Fired only one shot at Starling—and got him!"

The sheriff's gray eyes flashed with resentment.

"A chance shot, most likely," he retorted bitterly. "I'll give him an opportunity to try another! Starling must have discovered something that was peculiar about this gent, only it takes a little questionin' to make a man remember. Sometimes, the way a man sits his horse, or wears his hat, is enough to identify him, and if Starling noticed anything like that, I'm goin' to find it out!" He turned crisply upon his two deputies. "We'll get a bite to eat, boys, and then we'll grab a couple of fresh horses and start for the Cross Circle Ranch!"

Aroused to an almost equal degree of resentment, his deputies needed no further urging. In the face of this greater crime, they forgot their fatigue and their previous disappointment and were eager to be upon the bandit's trail again. While they dispatched a hasty breakfast, other hands secured and saddled fresh mounts for them, and, fifteen minutes later, they were on their way.

It was about seven miles, from Crocker City to the Cross Circle ranch house, and they made it in a little less than half an hour. They noticed Doc Talbot's buckboard in the yard as they dismounted, and at one side of the house was a group of

Cross Circle punchers, evidently still engaged in discussing the affair. These looked up, interestedly, at Holloway's approach, but he took no notice of them. He was thinking of Gail, and his heart almost failed him as he approached the door. Hard as this blow was for him, he realized that it must be infinitely worse for her. He was hoping that he might get away without seeing her at all, when that hope was suddenly shattered. For it was the girl, herself, who answered the door!

Calm and clear-eyed, only the drawn expression of her beautiful features revealed the extent of her suffering.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came," she breathed, with an evident relief that thrilled Holloway to the core. "This has been terrible! The boys told me you were out hunting that cowardly bandit. Did you —did you——"

Holloway caught her hand and held it in a gentle pressure.

"I didn't see a sign of him, Gail," he admitted. "That's why I came out here. After I've had a talk with your uncle——"

He was halted by her sudden expression of dismay.

"Oh, but you can't talk to him now, Dave! He's been unconscious practically all the time, for hours! And Doctor Talbot won't let anybody near him!"

Her dismay could not equal the sheriff's. Having put his last hope in Ed Starling, he was now practically stumped. The alternative of waiting, until the rancher should recover sufficiently to talk, did not appeal to him at all. He was keyed up to the point where he wanted immediate action in this matter. Abruptly, his face lighted.

"Where's Bob Melford?" he demanded. "If I can't talk to your uncle, I'll talk to him! He's probably learned as much about that stick-up gent as I could, anyway!"

There was a moment of silence, during which the girl's face colored slightly.

"Bob hasn't been here since sundown," she returned, "and he doesn't know anything about it. I was the one who questioned my uncle concerning the bandit, and all he could say was that he was wearing a black mask and riding a pinto horse!"

Here was a slight clew, at least; but Holloway was more interested in Miss Starling's manner, just then, than her words.

"You say Bob Melford has been away since last evenin'?" he queried sharply. "Where's he been, and what's he been doing all this time? Huntin' strays, too?"

Before the girl could reply, one of the punchers, "Shorty" Meggs by name, left the group and came forward.

"No, he ain't been huntin' strays, sheriff," he volunteered boldly. "When he left, he said he was just goin' over to Coyote Pass, to see if them forest rangers had cleared out yet, and that he'd be back inside of two hours. The fact that he ain't showed up yet looks bad enough. But that ain't all! When he rode away he was forkin' a pinto horse!"

Holloway drew a quick breath and glanced at his two deputies, whose faces reflected an astonishment as great as his own. But it was quite another emotion that moved Gail Starling. With an impulsive little cry, she turned upon the puncher, her cheeks crimson, her blue eyes flashing.

"Meggs, how dare you make such an insinuation?" she demanded. "Either you are just plain stupid, or else you have a personal grudge against Mr. Melford! I would just as soon accuse myself of that crime as him!"

By this time Holloway had recovered himself.

"I'm sorry, Gail," he told her firmly, "but we can't be guided by our personal feelings in this; we've got to go by facts! And I'm forced to admit that the facts look mighty bad for your foreman! It's known that he was headin' for Coyote Pass when he left here, that he was ridin' the same kind of a horse as the stick-up gent, and that he ain't been back since! Besides, considerin' what his past has been——"

Unlucky words! Scarcely had he uttered them, when the girl turned from Meggs to him, her resentment tinged with a look of acutest pain.

"His past! You're holding that against him?" she cried. "Dave Holloway, I'm ashamed of you! I——"

The words ended in a choking sob, and, unable to say more, she whirled and fled back into the house.

The sheriff bit his lip in chagrin, for he realized that he had violated the code of the West, which holds that a man's past is sacred. At the same time, he felt a certain amount of justification for his act, in the attitude of the girl, herself, for surely, she had not been impartial! A fair amount of loyalty he might have expected,

but when she continued to defend Bob Melford in the face of all the damaging evidence he had cited, it could mean only one thing—that she was in love with him! And what man could have kept his head in a situation like this? The man whose existence had been merely a thorn in his side, had become an object of utter hatred to him. The jealousy that had been no more than a spark, the evening before, now swept through the sheriff like a consuming fire. With features grown suddenly tense, he turned upon his two deputies.

"Climb up, boys," he snapped. "We're ridin' back to Crocker City, pronto, to have some reward notices printed for the capture of Bob Melford! That reward will read 'one thousand dollars, cash,' and it'll go to the man who brings him in *alive!* You can't prove anything against a man who's dead, and if Melford is guilty of this crime, I want it proven beyond all doubt!"

The alacrity with which his men obeyed his order left no doubt as to their own convictions in the matter.

"It's no more than we might have expected, chief," declared Slim Daley indignantly, as they rode away. "We've been a bunch of saps, thinkin' that Melford ever wanted to go straight! He was just layin' low and waitin' for a chance to make a big, fat haul! He'd have made one last night, too, if it hadn't been for Ed Starling! Darned near did for Ed, too! Hangin's too good for a dog like that! Only I can't see how we're ever goin' to hang him! If he's got safe across the State line, them reward notices won't do any good! He'll just go back to his old gang again, and stay there!"

In the deputy's words was a measure of truth, which the sheriff, himself, had not overlooked. It was only reasonable to suppose that Melford would join his old gang again, and, once among them, he would be practically safe. For Holloway could not reach him legally from this side of the line, and, as for the authorities at Yellow Dog, their force was hopelessly inadequate to cope with that gang in their mountain stronghold. But, strangely enough, the sheriff did not appear to be discouraged by this knowledge.

"You leave that part of it to me," he retorted crisply. "We're in duty bound to post those reward notices, and we're goin' to post 'em! But, whether they do any good or not, I promise you I'll have Melford behind the bars inside of another forty-eight hours!"

Just what his plan of action was to be, the sheriff did not reveal to his associates, but an hour later, while the printer was grinding out the reward notices for Bob Melford's capture, and Crocker City was thrilling to the sensational disclosure of the latter's iniquity, Holloway sat in his little office, engaged in writing a letter. It was more of a note, to be exact, addressed to one Mike Kilrain, proprietor of the Arcade Saloon at Yellow Dog, and it read:

KILRAIN: Am inclosing a notice that will speak for itself. Believe Melford has gone back to his old gang and is now somewhere in your vicinity. The one-thousand-dollar reward will be paid to any one who delivers him this side of the State line. But remember that he must be delivered alive.

DAVE HOLLOWAY.

Just a few lines, they were, yet what a world of meaning they would convey to Mike Kilrain! If there was one man in the world who hated Bob Melford, it was this same saloon keeper at Yellow Dog. In bygone years, he had been the henchman of Frisco Pete; his saloon had been the gang's headquarters; and when Melford exterminated that gang, he had made of Kilrain a lifelong enemy. No one knew this better than Sheriff Holloway, and it was this knowledge which had induced him to write the present note. He intended to make Kilrain serve him where the law had failed!

Nor did there seem to be any doubt but that the plan would succeed. Not only would Kilrain jump at this chance to avenge himself upon Melford and make a cool thousand dollars at the same time, but every other factor necessary for the success of the plan was in his favor. Because it was the largest and best-equipped saloon in Yellow Dog, his place, much against his will, had now become the headquarters for Melford's gang, just as it had been for Frisco Pete's; and a meeting between him and Melford was inevitable. When that meeting came, Holloway was sure that Kilrain would take advantage of it, though what means he might employ to capture Melford or lure him back across the State line, he could not say.

"Reckon I don't need to worry any about that, though," he consoled himself grimly. "If Melford has gone back to

his old gang again, it's a sure sign that he's guilty of that holdup, and in that case it won't make much difference how he's brought to justice. The main thing is to see that he's brought there!"

Thus had the insidious emotion of jealousy warped the judgment of this most fair-minded of men! Were he in a normal mood, the very fact that he had been keeping his plan secret from his fellows would have warned him of its unjustness. But, already convinced that Bob Melford was guilty of that crime, he now had but one obsession—to bring him into court and legally prove him so! This wish was not fostered by any desire to hurt Gail Starling; for she seemed dearer to him now than ever; but he felt that Melford had been deceiving her, even more than the rest, and it was only fair that she should be disillusioned. If she continued to love the foreman, after his guilt had been proven, well and good; but at least, she should not do so blindly.

*"I just had to send for you, Dave," Gail sobbed. "I have something terrible to tell you."*

He was brought back to himself by the clatter of approaching hoofs. Glancing through the window, he perceived that the stage had just drawn up in front of the depot, ready to start on its return trip to Yellow Dog, which formed the other terminal of the route. If he wished Mike Kilrain to get his note that evening, it would have to leave Crocker City this noon. Seizing his hat, he darted over to the printer's, secured one of the reward notices, and placed it in the envelope with his note. Then he hurried out to the stage, reaching it just as Jeff Bates was climbing up into the seat.

"Hold her a minute, Bates," he requested, regretting the necessity of giving his plan even this much publicity. "Here's a little note I'd like to have you deliver for me! You can see that it's marked 'personal,' so don't give it to anybody else but the party it's addressed to. And since it's urgent, as well as personal, I'd like to have you deliver it as soon as you hit town. Reckon you got that straight?"

The driver took the envelope carelessly, his attitude that of one to whom such important missions were a daily occurrence. But no sooner had he glanced at the address, than his eyes widened, and his lips parted on the verge of a startled question—a question that was halted instantly by Holloway's warning frown.

"Sure, I get you, sheriff," he corrected himself quickly. "I hear what you say, and I can read English, too! At eight o'clock, sharp, this note'll be in that hombre's hands! Snap out of it, beauties! We're hittin' the trail for Yaller Dog!"

With the sending of that note, Holloway realized that the matter was at a standstill. He could not act again until he heard from Mike Kilrain, which, at the earliest, would not be until the next evening. Had he been compelled to spend that time in idleness, he would have found the waiting unbearable; but, fortunately, there was still much routine work to be done about the case. The reward notices he had ordered printed

must be posted in all the towns, and along all the important highways of the county. Even though he felt such action to be a waste of effort, it was required by the law, and it would also be of great advantage to himself, since it would give the public the impression that he was handling the case in a thoroughly legal and open manner. Accordingly, as soon as he had eaten, he gathered together a small corps of assistants, and set out to cover that section of the county which could not be reached through the mails.

It was not until the next evening that he returned, for the area he had covered was large, and there was nothing to call him back any sooner. Though he had managed to sleep a little during the night, he was dog tired, and, with a good hour intervening before the arrival of the stage, he decided to repair to the little room in the back of his office and get some much-needed rest.

But it seemed that this was not to be. Scarcely had Holloway lain down, when his ears caught the rhythmic drum of hoofbeats, approaching from the north end of town. They were the hoofbeats of a single horse, and, as it seemed to him, they were heading directly for his office. Without waiting to pull on his boots, he started for the door, reaching it just as the strange rider drew up.

Despite the fading light, he recognized the fellow instantly as Shorty Meggs of the Cross Circle Ranch.

"Well, out with it, Meggs," he snapped. "What's happened now?"

The puncher seemed in some distress.

"Miss Starling—she wants to see you, sheriff," he panted. "The old man—just passed out!"

Holloway caught hold of the door casing to steady himself.

"What?" he thundered. "Ed's passed out? Then Bob Melford is guilty of murder! Get Doc Talbot, Meggs! I'll be ready in——"

But the other interrupted him with a gesture.

"Doc's most likely there by now," he explained. "He was over at the Lazy D when it happened, and one of the boys went to fetch him immediate. I just came to deliver that message for Miss Starling. Says she's got somethin' mighty important to tell you and wants to see you right away! Guess it's mostly nerves, though, because she's plumb shot to pieces."

The sheriff drew a quick breath.

"Who wouldn't be?" he retorted. "This is sure tough for poor Gail! We'll grab a couple of fresh horses and be on our way, pronto!"

It was a strange conflict of emotions that filled Dave Holloway's heart, as the two pounded away through the dusk; love and pity for Gail Starling struggled, on the one hand, with increasing rage and resentment toward Bob Melford on the other. Whatever trickery he had employed to effect the latter's capture seemed entirely justifiable now. Indeed, he felt that the public would not only condone that act but might even go him one better by insisting on a lynching! This, of course, he must prevent at any cost, though he was influenced in this decision against such a measure, only by a sense of justice, now. No longer did he deem it necessary to prove Melford's guilt to the girl in court. Surely, this tragedy should have been enough to make her open her eyes! Perhaps it had, and this was the reason why she wished to see him!

Occupied with such thoughts as these, he was not conscious of the passing of time. It seemed that Meggs and he had scarcely left Crocker City behind them, when the lighted buildings of the Cross Circle Ranch loomed up ahead. But if he had not been counting the minutes, there was another who had. As they drew up before the house, a slim figure left the steps and ran forward to meet them. Meggs promptly excused himself, and Holloway and the girl were alone.

"I just had to send for you, Dave," she sobbed, reaching for his hand as trustingly as a child. "I have something terrible to tell you! It isn't about my uncle's death! It's about——"

"I know, Gail! It's about Melford. You've had your eyes opened to him, at last! But don't worry none; he'll never fool anybody again! I've beein doin' some good work since I left here, and I'll have him behind the bars before another twenty-four hours!"

He was hardly prepared for what followed. With a gasp, the girl withdrew her hand and stepped backward, her dismay so acute that he was alarmed.

"No, no, Dave!" she cried passionately.

"It is you who are blind—you and all the rest of them! Bob Melford never held up that stage! He merely took the blame for it to shield the one who did!"

Dumfounded, Holloway could only stare at her.

"What do you mean, girl? Are you sure you ain't foolin' yourself again? Who in the world does Bob Melford think so much of, that he'd do that?"

"Oh, Dave," she protested brokenly, "can't you see it without my telling you? It was—it was my uncle, himself!"

The vicissitudes of a sheriff's life had hardened Dave Holloway to most surprises, but not to such a blow as this. For a moment, he stood there speechless, paralyzed alike in mind and body. And in that moment, the girl stepped forward again, her hands once more reaching out to his.

"He told me so with his own lips," she sobbed, "in the last rational interval that was granted him before he died, after you left here. He seemed to know that the end was near, and he couldn't bear to die with that guilt on his soul. It was his wretched finances that caused it all! He needed twenty thousand dollars the other day to pay off a note, but the bank wouldn't let him have it and he was desperate. He was acquainted with the officials of the Ophir mines, and he knew that a consignment of dust was coming through that day, so he decided to take this chance of getting the money. Under pretense of hunting for strays, he went out to Coyote Pass and waited there until the stage came through. As it was very dark then, and he was wearing a mask, he didn't think that he would be recognized by the driver.

"As it turned out, he wasn't," she went on, "and I guess he would have succeeded in his attempt if it hadn't been for Bob Melford. But Bob came along just then, as you know, and chased him away. It wasn't Bob's first shot that got him, but one that he fired a little later, after they had left the pass. He was ready to give himself up, then, and take the consequences, but Bob wouldn't hear of it. I guess he was thinking of me and knew how much I needed my uncle. At the same time, he realized that uncle's wound was likely to bring suspicion upon him if it wasn't explained satisfactorily and he took the only means of doing this. He sent uncle back to the ranch, while he kept on across the State line, willing to let people believe him guilty of the holdup if they wished."

Though the night was cool, beads of perspiration stood out upon the sheriff's forehead. He struggled desperately to speak, but found his tongue unequal to the effort. Yet, somehow, the girl seemed to understand.

"Don't take it so badly, dear," she told him gently. "I knew all the time why you were so willing to believe Bob guilty of that crime. But I felt too hurt to reassure you. Now that his innocence has been proven, I don't mind telling you that I never could care for him as I do for you. There is a difference between admiration and love! But I do admire him, and I know that you must, too, especially after what he has done, now. It was a great, a splendid sacrifice! But we can't let him make such a sacrifice in vain. The truth must be known, and his name cleared, and he must be brought back to the Cross Circle again where we need him."

She stood very close to Dave now, smiling up into his face. But in this, the greatest moment of his life, when he should have known his utmost happiness, Dave Holloway's heart went dead. With a groan, he thrust the girl from him and turned toward the horse.

"Don't Gail, don't," he begged. "I can't listen to such talk as that! I'm not worth it! And I haven't time to explain why! If I want to save Bob Melford, I've got to start ridin', and ride like blazes!"

Almost before he had finished speaking, he was in the saddle. An instant later he was out of the yard and streaking off along the trail to Yellow Dog. And in his brain burned but a single thought—that fateful letter!

Not until now did he realize the enormity of his act. It was not so much the illegality of the note that worried him, as it was the fact that he had placed it in the hands of such a man as Mike Kilrain. That note had been practically an order for Kilrain to get Bob Melford, and, though Holloway had made it plain that he wanted Melford taken alive, what assurance had he that Kilrain would comply with that wish? He was not a man who needed money badly, but he *did* desire revenge, very deeply. In consequence of which, he might deliberately shoot Melford in the

back and claim self-defense while trying to bring him in!

Though that thought had not occurred to Holloway before, it became almost a conviction now, such was his change of viewpoint at the knowledge of Melford's innocence. And, in this event, he would be as guilty of the foreman's murder as if he, himself, had fired the shot! Half crazed by the realization of this, he had but one hope—to reach Yellow Dog before Kilrain had time to act! A mighty slim hope it was, for Kilrain must have received the note the evening before, and, in the twenty-four hours intervening, Melford and he would have had an opportunity to meet more than once. Yet, it *was* a hope, and Holloway clutched at it as the drowning man clutches at a straw. In the pale light of the newly risen moon he fairly burned up the trail before him.

Almost before he knew it, he was at the foot of the grade leading up to Coyote Pass. Here he was compelled to slow down a bit, though he chafed inwardly at the delay, and it seemed an hour before he reached the summit. As he did so, however, his ears caught a sound that brought him momentarily out of himself; it was the rumble of wheels and the clatter of approaching hoofs!

"The stage!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't I think of it before? If there's any news, Jeff Bates will be sure to have it, and——"

He cut short his words, as the four horses appeared suddenly in the pass ahead of him and pulled up for their customary breathing spell. At the same moment, Jeff Bates, perched upon his high seat, saw him. But he made no move toward his rifle. The moonlight had enabled him to recognize Holloway at a glance.

"By thunder, sheriff," he boomed, as the other slowed up beside him, "you're just the gent I was hopin' to see! Do you know what happened last night in Yaller Dog?"

Holloway's heart missed a beat.

"I ain't doin' any guessin'," he snapped. "Out with it!"

"Sure! Mike Kilrain shot Bob Melford dead!"

The reins fell from Dave Holloway's nerveless hands. His body slumped down in the saddle like a rag. For a moment, Jeff Bates, the stagecoach, and even the rocky wall of the pass, itself, became just a blur before his eyes. Yet he was dimly conscious that the driver was speaking again.

"Yep, shot him plumb dead, sheriff! It happened along about ten o'clock, just after I'd put up my horses and gone to the hotel to turn in. Melford had been in town most all day, talkin' with his gang. Seems they were tryin' to get him to join 'em again, but he wouldn't do it, and they parted company kind of miffed. That evening he dropped in at the Arcade, and him and Kilrain had a game of cards. Seems he ought to have known better than to do that, because Kilrain was his sworn enemy. But everything went all right till they'd had a few drinks. Then Kilrain made a crooked deal, and Melford called him on it. Before any one knew it, Kilrain had plugged him—shootin' from under the table! I ain't got no love for Melford, seein' what he turned out to be, but I claim that deal was sure a raw one, shootin' a man under the table! Kilrain ought to swing for it!"

Slowly, the fog wisps cleared from Sheriff Holloway's brain, details once more asserted themselves before his eyes. With a deep breath hed rew himself erect. His face showd gray and drawn in the moonlight.

"You made one mistake, Bates," he stated tensely. "It wasn't Mike Kilrain that done for Bob Melford! It ain't him that ought to swing for that murder! Do you remember that letter I had you deliver?"

Amazed at his opening words, the driver had regarded him blankly. Now, as if seized by a sudden inspiration, he let out an oath and dove into the pocket of his coat. When he faced Holloway again, he was as mortified as a schoolboy.

"Heck, sheriff," he groaned. "I wouldn't blame you if you'd tar and feather me! I've been drivin' this stage for fifteen years, and nobody ever yet could accuse me of not carryin' out my obligations. But last night when I got to Yaller Dog I was so plumb tired, and after that shootin' come off I was thinkin' of so many other things, that I'll be darned if I didn't forget to give Kilrain that letter!"

# His Ghost-Town Legacy

He thought he had inherited a verdant valley and a gold mine, but he found he had a ghost town

By Hugh F. Grinstead

Illustrated by Ralph Nelson

*Almost at his feet, lay a huddle of disreputable buildings with sagging roofs and leaning walls; and when he came nearer, he knew it for Peach Spring.*

AT least a dozen times on the thousand-mile journey westward, Dan Bradford reconstructed his mental vision of Peach Spring and the property his Uncle Daniel had left him. Looking from the car window, he had seen the verdant hills of his native State emerge into a level plain with limitless fields of wheat. Night brought an even greater change, and on the following morning he looked out upon a constantly shifting panorama of deep canyons and barren hills, painted rocks and stunted vegetation. He was nearing his destination now, and he looked eagerly for the blossoming valleys and tree-clad mountains his fancy had pictured.

He had never known his Uncle Daniel, had scarcely heard of him until a few months before, when news came that the old man had died somewhere in the West, leaving everything he owned to his namesake. Apparently he had only land, but he had acres of it, along with numerous town lots. He must have owned half the town. He had left no will, but the deed had been made out and signed a year before his death, and never recorded. By a curious entailment, the legatee must maintain a residence upon a part of the property for five years before he could sell any of it.

Dan had scanned the only map at hand, but all he found was the little railroad town of Rawhide, which happened to be the county seat of Ponderosa County. It was not a late map, however, and he concluded that Peach Spring was one of the new and thriving communities that are constantly growing up in this land of wonderful opportunities. The name itself was suggestive, and Dan gave his imagination free rein as he sped westward. He recalled pleasing pictures of fruitful regions he had seen in the highly colored literature of land companies.

He got his first jolt when he swung off the train at the motley little town of Rawhide, and went to the courthouse to have his deed recorded. The recorder, who was also the county clerk, informed him that his filing was in regular order, but that there were five years of back taxes due against the property. It took most of Dan's ready cash to pay off the indebtedness. Uncle Daniel must have been an eccentric person or very neglectful in business matters. Dan wondered that the property had not been sold for taxes in that time.

When he made inquiries about town as to the whereabouts of Peach Spring and the best way to get there, he was usually greeted by a blank look of astonishment, which changed to one of amusement. It

was with great difficulty that he succeeded in getting any information at all. He attributed the reticence of the people to the jealousy that he had been told was apt to exist between rival towns in a new country. There was evidently little communication between the two places, and it was only by bartering for a diminutive burro that he finally secured means of transportation for his personal effects. The man who sold him the burro was kind enough to advise him to take a supply of provisions with him. "You never can tell," was the only reason he gave for the suggestion.

Had Dan been full of years and experience, instead of barely twenty-three, he might have guessed the truth; but it was with hope undimmed, that he left Rawhide the following morning, driving his pack animal before him. Fifteen miles away, he had been told, lay Peach Spring. If the people held intercourse with the outside world, it must be through some other place than Rawhide, he thought. Only an enmity of long standing could account for the condition of the trail, an overgrown trace that was difficult to follow.

The morning passed, and noon came, with little change in the drab surroundings of sand, and cactus, and sage. It was near the middle of the afternoon when he passed a big rock on which had been chiseled an inscription, announcing the fact that Peach Spring lay but four miles ahead. Below this welcome information some one had scratched at a more recent date, "hell not verry fur."

Dan wiped the sweat from his brow and grinned at this reminder of the heat. He had seen no one since leaving Rawhide, and jack rabbits and horned toads constituted the sum total of animal life he had encountered. With only four miles between him and his destination, he began eagerly to scan the horizon ahead, for some indication of an oasis in the forbidding region.

It lacked an hour to sunset, when he came to a low rim of rock and looked down upon a sort of valley or cove. At the upper end of it, a dried lake bed shimmered in the sunlight, and, almost at his feet, lay a huddle of disreputable buildings with sagging roofs and leaning walls. When he came nearer, he knew it for Peach Spring, because a faded sign nailed to the front of the largest house announced to all who might read that it was "Peach Spring Tavern." Bats and owls, its only guests, flew from the broken windows, when Dan opened the creaking door and peered within. No friendly curl of smoke greeted his vision, when he looked toward the other houses.

Peach Spring was a ghost town!

Dan sat down weakly upon the crumbling step in front of the old tavern and gazed across at the shutterless windows of half a dozen shacks on the opposite side of what had doubtless been the main thoroughfare of Peach Spring, now a jungle of cactus clumps and sage. A prairie dog chattered noisily from its mound on a vacant lot, and a lonesome owl fluttered from one tenantless shack to another. There was no similarity whatever between what he beheld and the rosy picture his imagination had painted.

He knew now why the property had not been sold for taxes—there could be no sale without a buyer. The way the people of Rawhide had acted when questioned about Peach Spring was also clear to him. It wasn't often they had a chance to get so much fun out of one tenderfoot. They would laugh about it for weeks, and pass it on to every visitor.

"I just wonder if this was Uncle Daniel's idea of a joke, or if he had something against the family and took it out on me," Dan muttered to himself. "Huh, I see myself living here five years, or five days for that matter. Couldn't ever sell it for enough to pay the taxes if I lived here twenty years. Land won't produce crops without irrigation in a country where it rains once or twice a year, and I don't see any signs of a gold mine."

He would be compelled to pass at least one night in the ghostly place, for the sun was already touching the western horizon. He was hungry and thirsty, and at that moment inclined to feel grateful toward the citizen of Rawhide who had advised him to take along a small supply of provisions. There would be water somewhere about—a spring, unless the name bestowed upon the place was also a joke.

Trusting more to the keen scent of the burro than to his own vision, Dan set about his search for the spring. What he finally found was a deep pool with sloping banks, right at the base of a low rocky ledge some two hundred yards from the cluster of dilapidated shacks. It was not at all like the flowing springs he had been accus-

tomed to seeing in his native State. A few feet from the water's edge on one side, stood the gnarled trunks of half a dozen stunted trees, some of them dead. The leaves on the ones that still struggled for existence, proclaimed them to be, indeed, peach trees. Growing in the moist soil beneath them were as many slender seedlings that would take the place of the old trees when they were gone.

The burro ambled down the bank to drink, and Dan filled his canteen, surprised to find that the water was cool and clear, and the pool apparently very deep. There were signs that many animals, evidently sheep, had watered here quite recently. The narrow paths the creatures had made could be seen leading off toward the higher ground.

"Must be a ranch of some sort not very many miles away," Dan mused, as he screwed the cap on his canteen and prepared to retrace his steps to the old tavern, where he had decided to pass the night.

Searching about for fuel with which to start a fire, he was surprised to find that one of the rooms had been swept clean of the accumulated sand within the last few days. A scrap of greasy paper and some crusts of bread lying on the window sill were evidence that the visitor had eaten his lunch in the room. When Dan had slipped the pack from the burro, he brought everything in there and spread his blanket on the floor.

Pulling loose boards from the disintegrating structures, he secured an armful of fuel and kindled a fire outdoors. Soon he was broiling bacon at the end of a stick and making coffee in an old tomato can that some previous camper had discarded. When he had eaten his simple fare, he sat for a time under the cool stars that twinkled down from a cloudless dome. There was a pale glow in the east, and presently the moon appeared above the horizon to light up the abandoned shacks and throw long shadows from the ghostly yucca that dotted the little valley.

There was a sort of beauty in the barren prospect. Except for an occasional sound from some night bird, absolute silence reigned. With the buoyancy of youth, Dan had already recovered from his first disappointment, and was taking a genuine pleasure in his very unusual experience. He planned to stay at least one day and investigate this community of vanished hopes that had once been the scene of bustling activity. But, tired from his long tramp, he soon sought his blanket. Lying down without removing his clothes, he slept soundly until daylight.

When he awoke, he made the further discovery that the walls of the room had been adorned with pictures cut from magazine covers, while a brave attempt had been made to wash the single pane of glass remaining in one of the windows. A fragment of broken looking-glass lay on a narrow shelf by the door. He had not been able to see all this in the dim light the evening before. Some campers, he thought, had likely stayed here for several days.

When he had cooked and eaten his breakfast, he set about his tour of inspection. In the old building that had once been a saloon, he found the crude bar and a shattered mirror behind it. Romance and adventure, doubtless tragedy, had lurked here in time. Some of the red paint remained on a barber pole before a crumbling shack, the iron parts of an old stagecoach had been left to rust, by the side of what had been a blacksmith shop. In the little post office, some crumpled papers lay beneath a heavy coat of dust. Much of the old board walk had been torn up and burned by the infrequent campers who came that way.

"Wish I could run across somebody that would tell me all about this old place before I shake the dust off my feet and hike back to the railroad," Dan grunted. "Might be I could appreciate the joke, if I knew."

It was near noon when he completed his rounds and returned to the room where he had passed the night. It was cool here, and he sat down to rest a little while.

Soon he became aware of a confused, murmuring sound that gradually swelled in volume until he knew it for the bleating of many sheep. He looked out from the broken window and saw hundreds of dirty-white creatures moving toward the water hole, their herder walking behind them and directing the sheep dog. After a few minutes, the clamor ceased, as the sheep drank and lay down for their noon rest.

Dan bestirred himself; he would go out and interview the sheep-herder, who might be able to tell him more than he had al-

ready guessed about the deserted town and its history. It was comforting to see another human being in this desolate spot. As he stepped out in the sunlight, he almost bumped into the herder, who was walking swiftly toward the deserted tavern.

He saw a slender youth, wearing overalls and a blue shirt, boots, and broad-brimmed hat. At sight of Dan, suddenly emerging from a house that was supposed to be tenanted by only bats and owls, there was a little shriek of dismay and fright as the young herder turned to fly from the spot.

"Hey, kid!" Dan shouted. "Hold on! No use to run—I won't hurt you. Come back and let's be friends. I want to ask you something about this old place."

When the youngster turned around and looked directly toward the man who spoke so reassuringly, Dan's jaw dropped in amazement, and he blinked uncertainly at what he saw. This was no boy at all, but a girl in the first bloom of young womanhood. There was a trace of doubt and uncertainty in the blue eyes, as she stood regarding the young man who had so mysteriously appeared in this place where nobody was known to be.

"I—I beg your pardon, miss, I didn't know," Dan stammered helplessly. "My name's Bradford, Dan Bradford, and I guess you might say this old graveyard town is my home," he hastily explained by way of introducing himself.

If he had expected the explanation to quiet the fears of the girl, he was quick to see his mistake. Her eyes widened, and he imagined she paled a little, as she involuntarily took a quick step backward, like a frightened creature ready to fly at the first indication of pursuit. Dan noted this and added quickly:

"My Uncle Daniel left it to me when he died. I just got here last night, and I don't yet know what it's all about."

At that, her eyes lost their frightened look, and the suggestion of a smile played around her mouth for an instant.

"Oh, I see," she said in evident relief.

But Dan did not see, at that moment, why his amended explanation should put her at ease, when she had evidently been frightened before. He could not know that she had, indeed, heard of his uncle, and that his unexpected introduction of himself by that name had filled her with a fear that she was facing either a designing impostor, a crazy man or a rejuvenated ghost. There followed an awkward pause, and, to relieve the embarrassing silence, Dan put a very natural question.

"You live near here, do you?" he asked.

"Six miles south," she replied.

"You mean to say you walk twelve miles a day and drive those sheep?" he asked in amazement.

"Not every day. When I graze them out this way, I have to get to this water by noon and give them a little rest before I start back. The next day I take them to Packsaddle Canyon, which isn't so far. That way I change pasture every day and give the grass a better chance."

For a moment Dan regarded this slip of a girl, who could walk twelve miles a day and talk so intelligently about such a prosaic task as sheep-herding. He caught sight of a small package in her hand, and it occurred to him that it was her lunch, and that she was responsible for the tidiness of the room he had occupied, and incidentally for the scrap of mirror on the little shelf.

"Oh, it was you that swept out the room and washed the window!" he exclaimed in sudden understanding. "Well, say, I'm not taking possession of everything; go ahead and eat your lunch in there if you wish. I've got a fire outside, and if you're not in a hurry you can have some of my coffee, as soon as it boils."

She hesitated a moment and gave him a searching look. As if satisfied that a man with such a frank and open countenance could be nothing less than a gentleman, she came on up to the door and went in. Dan added fresh fuel to the fire, and filled the can with water. He set it to boil while he went to his pack for the coffee and his strip of bacon.

Later, when he came to the door to offer her the can of coffee, he chuckled softly, for the girl was standing before the piece of broken mirror. She had taken off the big hat and was doing something to her hair—hair of just the right shade to go with blue eyes. She turned around and flushed slightly when she heard a step behind her; and at that instant Dan realized that she was very pretty.

Her lunch was already spread out on the window sill, and she could do no less than invite him to share it with her, which

she did with a shyness that persisted. With the coffee and some slices of bacon that he had broiled over the coals, Dan made a fair contribution to the meal. And, as is ever the custom of people when they break bread together, they talked in a friendly manner while they ate. Some of the girl's shyness disappeared, but the conversation lagged when Dan ceased to question her.

"Have you lived in this country a long time?" Dan asked.

"All my life," she replied.

"You can tell me something about this old town, then. What excuse was there for its existence, and why did they call it Peach Spring?"

"Copper, they thought, but the prospect pinched out about the time the railroad was built and missed the town. Then everybody went to Rawhide or left the country. Some old prospector planted a peach tree by the water hole years go, and that's how it got its name."

"Did you ever know my old uncle that owned just about all of this old town?" Dan inquired.

She nodded. "Almost ever since I can remember. He was here for a few weeks by himself every year; sometimes all summer. The last two years he didn't show up, and we heard that he had died over the other side of the mountains."

"What kind of a man was he?"

"He hated sheep," was her prompt, if somewhat evasive reply.

"Hated sheep?" asked Dan, puzzled.

"Once when I was just old enough to take the sheep out by myself, he came out and clubbed them away from the water hole. He killed two and crippled some more."

"The murderous old pirate!" Dan impulsively exclaimed.

"I guess he had a right to," she said, trying, apparently to judge the old man with all fairness.

"Had a right to kill and cripple animals belonging to somebody else?" asked Dan, indignantly.

"But it was his water hole, and most people don't like to have sheep around their water," was the sober reply.

"Funny he owned about all of this old town and some of the land alongside."

"I've heard he had money then, and he bought it from the others at his own price when they left," was her explanation.

"Anyway, I think Uncle Daniel's nut must have been screwed on wrong somehow, or he wouldn't have paid good money for this old graveyard, and then have left it to somebody that hadn't ever harmed him," Dan decided.

"He had faith in the place," said the girl softly.

"Well, that's more than I've got," Dan admitted. "I guess maybe he meant well when he left it to me; but if I had the money back that I paid out in delinquent taxes, I'd walk off and leave it to the tender mercies of the prairie dogs and owls. I guess that's what I'll do anyway."

His announcement evidently called for no reply, and she made none. What she presently said had to do with her own affairs.

"I must be going now," she said, as she reached for her hat. "If I wait too long I'll have to crowd the sheep to get back home before night, and it isn't good for sheep to go too fast while grazing."

"I'm glad this was your day to visit Peach Spring," he told her. "Otherwise, I might have gone away almost as ignorant as when I came."

If she was glad they had met, she didn't say so; and she went without giving him further opportunity for questioning her. He stood looking after her while she started her charges toward the home corral. She turned once and looked back when she topped the rise of ground before disappearing from view, and she saw him standing there where she had left him.

"Just a kid, maybe eighteen years old," Dan muttered to himself. "Always heard that sheep-herders were a crazy lot, but I'd say she was about as far from it as she could be, judging from her talk."

Dan spent the remainder of the afternoon poking into unexplored corners. He found a rusted six-shooter where it had lain for twenty years or more at the back of the old saloon; some of the glassware was still under the bar. Hanging against the wall in one of the shacks were a frying pan and a coffeepot that didn't leak. They had not yet rusted out, as they would have done in a more humid climate, and Dan appropriated them to his own use.

Again he slept in the room with the cheap pictures on the wall and the scrap of looking-glass on the shelf. He told himself he would be leaving in the morning, and he was astir with the first flush of

daylight. A sort of haze filled the bowl where the deserted town lay quiet as the grave. He walked up the slope a little way beyond the water hole, almost to the beginning of the rim rock, and there he stopped to look down upon the huddle of tumble-down shanties, an indistinct blur in the gray dawn. He stood there a little while, watching the light of day filter slowly into the cuplike valley.

Presently the sun appeared above the horizon, suddenly and without warning, as it is apt to do in arid regions. The giant cactus and black rocks threw long shadows, and the mean little shacks stood out boldly, like towering castles. The dried lake bed shimmered in the sudden light, as if the surface had been water instead of lifeless sand.

"By jingoes!" Dan exclaimed wonderingly. "I didn't know it could look as pretty as that! A fellow could easy imagine those little weeds and bunches of dead grass were growing crops, if he didn't know better."

The beauty of the picture was gone, almost as suddenly as it had appeared. As the sun rose higher, the aspect resumed a flat monotony, and again Dan saw only the ugly shanties surrounded by a wilderness of straggly shrubs and thirsty sand.

He made his morning fire, and cooked and ate his breakfast. But when it was finished he made no move to pack his outfit on the burro and take his departure, as he had planned. He sat on the crumbling door sill and contemplated the barren acres that might be his if he cared to live there for five years. He shook his head positively at the prospect.

"Anyway, I think I'll stay another day, something might turn up," he persuaded himself. "Maybe Uncle Daniel wasn't as crazy as he seemed. Might be something here worth looking into that everybody don't know about. And I might find out something more if——"

*"I was afraid you would be gone," she said with a little catch in her breath. "There is something more you ought to know."*

He left the sentence unfinished, and sat there musing. Presently, he got up and continued his investigations of the day before. He went as far as the gaping entrance to the old copper mine beneath the rim rock. Here he found a rusted boiler, half buried in the sand, and he knew that machinery of some kind had been installed there in the heyday of the community.

After a while he came back and sat in

the shade of the old tavern, to watch the shimmering heat waves dance upward from ground that was parched and bare. Long before noon he caught himself listening hopefully for the sound of bleating sheep. Then he recalled that the girl had said she would be grazing her flock in another direction on that day. It might be several days before she came again to Peach Spring, and before that he would certainly be gone. There was no excuse for staying.

Yet fully an hour earlier than on the preceding day, he heard the faint murmuring sound of the sheep, and his heart gave a great thump in spite of him. He reminded himself that likely there were other herds of sheep in that region, it was all free and open range. During the next half hour he passed through a period of eager suspense that he would not have admitted. After a time, the leaders of the flock appeared, and through the fog of dust he saw the herder. He would have known her among a hundred, even if she had not waved in a friendly manner when she caught sight of him. He went quickly, eagerly, to meet her. Some of the reserve and shyness of the day before was gone, and she held out her hand. It was cool and soft in his palm.

"I was afraid you would be gone," she said with a little catch in her breath. "There is something more you ought to know. I should have told you yesterday."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"About your uncle," she went on hurriedly. "He was always prospecting along the edge of the rim rock. Not near the old copper mine, but on the other side. I have seen him there, and I can show you the prospect holes. Maybe he wasn't as foolish as people thought. It doesn't seem natural that he would want to leave you just a worthless burden, and, anyway, I thought I ought to tell you."

"I'm sure obliged to you for going so far out of your way to tell me."

"It wasn't any trouble. I've been running the sheep in the canyon too much lately, the grass is much better out this way," she insisted. She wasn't looking toward Dan when she said that.

"I've been thinking, too, that maybe Uncle Dan wasn't as crazy as he seemed, and I had about made up my mind to hang around a few days longer," said Dan. "Got enough grub, such as it is, to last me near a week, and the donkey seems able to take care of himself."

The sheep were at the water hole, drinking, and would soon lie down for their noon rest. Dan noted, with a thrill of pleasure, that the parcel the girl carried was nearly twice the size of the one she had brought the day before. She signified her intention of showing him the old prospect holes at once, as soon as she could lay her lunch down.

They found the old prospect pits, five in number, the deepest of them scarcely more than six feet in depth. Some were almost filled with drifted sand; the gravelly walls of all of them were seamed and crumbled from long exposure to the elements.

"I'll gopher this sand out some way and see if I can find out what Uncle Daniel was after," Dan declared enthusiastically. "I saw several rusty picks and an old shovel in one of the shacks."

They walked back to the old tavern. Again he made coffee, and she spread the lunch out on a newspaper laid on the ground, just as if it had been planned between them. They were like old friends, now, and he felt that he might, at this point, ask her something personal without appearing impertinent.

"Oh yes, I went away to school two winters. Then I taught our district school over on Horsehide Creek one year," she replied in answer to his query.

"They employ youngsters to teach their school, do they?" he teased.

"I'm almost twenty," she retorted, her chin tilted provokingly.

Dan laughed good-naturedly.

"And where do you get the children to teach? I didn't see a house between here and Rawhide."

"Oh, there are a number of families in the Horsehide valley, and in Packsaddle Canyon, too. They have water there, with nice homes, and orchards, and gardens and alfalfa."

He grinned. "That's just the kind of picture I had of Peach Spring when I learned that I had inherited Uncle Daniel's acres. All the way out here I would see rows of peach trees and fields of alfalfa every time I shut my eyes—and now look at the blank I drew!"

"It would be like that here, if you could get the water on it," she said gravely.

"You mean if there were water within

miles to put on it," he objected. "I don't see how they expected to make a town here without water."

"There's the water hole," she said, pointing. "Peach Spring."

"But the storm water caught in that little basin wouldn't last long if there were hundreds of people using it."

"But it isn't rain water, it's a spring," the girl explained. "There were five hundred people here once, and they all used water out of it. They built a quartz mill here in the early days, and my father says the steam pump, running day and night, failed to lower the level of the water. Of course the water won't flow out, it has to be pumped, and you couldn't irrigate the land because it is higher than the water."

"So it looks as though I'd have to make my fortune some other way," he said, laughing. "I went to the Ag School a little while, and have some knowledge of agricultural engineering; but what I don't know about mining would fill a cartload of books. Anyway, here's where I start learning. I am keen to know what lies at the bottom of uncle's prospect holes, and I'm willing to begin at the bottom and work down."

The sheep had finished their noon siesta, and were moving restlessly about and beginning to scatter, before the fair shepherd thought of her charges, with a guilty start. The minutes had gone swiftly for the man and girl. She held out her hand to Dan and turned to go.

"Just one more thing before you go," he said. "You wouldn't mind telling me your name, would you?"

She colored prettily, overwhelmed with embarrassment at what she considered her own blunder.

"Oh, how thoughtless of me!" she exclaimed. "I'm Irma Shelton."

"Good-by, Irma."

"Good-by—Dan."

She went quickly, nor did she look back until she had her flock in a compact mass and moving homeward. Then she turned and waved to the young man who stood forlornly against the background of tottering shacks. He watched her until she was out of sight.

"Solid gold and right easy to look at," he muttered.

Dan Bradford didn't wait for the coming of another day before beginning his search for hidden wealth. Before night came, he had cleared one of the prospect holes of the loose gravel and sand. The following morning he set to work with pick and shovel in the bottom of the shaft. He did, indeed, find glittering yellow particles in the fragments of rock he broke off; but, strange to say, his enthusiasm waned rather than increased at the discovery. After a little while, he went on to another prospect hole, and failed to thrill at what he found there.

Sound judgment and clear reasoning should, by all means, have led Irma Shelton to take her sheep to Packsaddle Canyon on that third day. Two days in succession she had been at Peach Spring, and that last day it had been necessary to crowd the animals on the return, on account of having tarried too long at the noon watering.

But she heeded not the dictates of reason. Perhaps it was curiosity, perhaps something not so easy for her to define, that prompted her to change her course when she had gone a mile toward Packsaddle Canyon, and to swing around over the same route she had taken on the two days previous. If she changed her mind after leaving home, the fact that she had started off with enough lunch for two was not so easily explained.

Illogically enough, Dan Bradford would have been disappointed if she had done otherwise. He could not have told why he set the coffeepot to boil without making any other preparation for his midday meal. He hadn't even sliced bacon, when, for the third time, he became conscious of the murmuring sound produced by the bleating of many sheep.

The girl confessed that she had come to tell him something she had forgotten the day before; but when they had finished their dinner together, staying long over the meal, and she had hurried after the restless sheep, Dan could not recall anything definite in the way of information that she had imparted. He was aware, however, that the visit had been a delightful one.

They discovered that they had a lot of wonderfully interesting things in common. The conversational topics were of a more personal nature than heretofore. She displayed just the right amount of hopeful enthusiasm over the ore specimens he had taken from the prospect holes of the elder Bradford. Had she been indifferent, he

would not have been displeased. He showed more interest, himself, now, than he had when he broke off those brassy yellow fragments.

He went reluctantly back to the task of prospecting, only to prove to himself, beyond a doubt, that his uncle had been utterly without judgment in the matter of prospecting for precious metals in that particular place. Even with his imperfect knowledge of minerals, Dan had instantly recognized the glittering fragments of ore as iron pyrites, "fool's gold." He hadn't the heart to tell the girl of his suspicions; it had been so kind of her to tell him about those old prospect holes, and he had appreciated her interest. And, too, he wanted a logical excuse for staying just a day or two longer. She had said she would come again.

The thought of another long day of idleness, perhaps two of them, was distasteful to Dan, and, in the early morning, he began to prowl about the little valley, looking at it from every side. Without knowing just why, he was aware of a growing fondness for the place; he was loath to leave it, forbidding as the prospect was. He had satisfied himself that his Uncle Daniel's hopes had been but the foolish fancy of a childish old man.

He stood on the slope above the water hole and looked across toward the dried lake bed, nearly half a mile away, in the narrow flat that appeared to be the natural outlet of the valley, had one been needed. On the right hand extremity of the valley curved the high rim rock where the entrance to the old mine was. On the opposite side of the circular basin, some five or six hundred yards from the high rim, it was bordered by a low ledge that in some places was no more than a gentle slope. At a distance, the valley had the appearance of a huge tub with one high side and the other cut away to a slight rim.

"Sometimes a fellow's eyes fool him," Dan mused as he looked over what appeared to be perfectly level ground. "I wonder if it could be—I just wonder, now."

Dan Bradford was not one to spend much time in fruitless pondering. If his curiosity were sufficiently aroused, he set out to find ways of satisfying it. He stood where he was for a few minutes, his mind busy revolving a very definite plan. Presently he walked back toward the cluster of old buildings, and approached one that was already in an advanced state of disintegration.

Prying at the light framework until one end of the flimsy structure threatened to collapse, he succeeded in loosening a two-by-four scantling some ten or twelve feet long, with an edge that was apparently straight. He searched around the old saloon and found an empty bottle with flat sides. He carried these, along with a few stakes made from broken boards, to the water hole. It would have puzzled an onlooker to guess what use he would make of his queer equipment; and, had his actions been observed during the hours that followed, the riddle would likely not even then have been solved.

He first filled the bottle almost full of water, and whittled out a stopper of soft wood to fit it tightly. When he had driven a stake about three feet long in the mud at the edge of the water hole, he held one end of the long scantling on top of the stake and rested the other end on the ground farther up the slope so that it was in an approximately horizontal position. He determined this by laying the bottle of water with the small air bubble in it on the flat surface of the scantling. He then moved the end of the timber until the air bubble was in the center, and marked the point on the ground where the end of the scantling rested.

Here another stake was driven and the process repeated, gradually moving up the sloping bank of the little basin surrounding the water hole. Proceeding thus with the improvised level, he was able to determine the height of the bordering rim of the basin above the level of the water, by adding together the numbers representing the heights of the stakes. He had alternately reversed both the bottle and the piece of lumber, in order to correct any error that might exist.

The result of his crude engineering showed him that the point he had reached was twenty-six feet, lacking a few inches, above the level of the water. Looking out over the little valley, Dan shook his head hopelessly. It was inconceivable that any part of his holdings as conveyed to him by his eccentric kinsman, could be below, or even on a level with, the surface of the water in the so-called spring.

Still, as Dan had said to himself, the eye is often deceiving. Using his crude

level in the same manner as he had when determining that the water hole was twenty-six feet below the level of the surrounding ground surface, he ran a line off at an angle to the right, toward that segment of the high rim rock between the water hole and the old copper mine. The intervening land appeared to be the lowest spot in all the area inclosed by the bordering hills.

It was a wearisome task, squatting on the ground, slipping the scantling along ten feet at a time and carefully leveling it each time. The ground appeared to be almost level, nowhere was there more than a three or four-inch drop in ten feet of horizontal distance—usually there was less than half that. He took the measurements carefully and wrote them down with a pencil on a scrap of paper. Noon had come and passed before Dan had completed his line of levels to his objective, some three hundred yards from the water hole. Then, by adding his long column of figures, he discovered that the fall of ground in all that distance was only eleven feet, and he was still some fifteen feet higher than the surface of the water in the spring.

"And water can't be made to run uphill," he admitted. "Still, I have seen it look that way," he added.

It would hardly be correct to say that the absorbing task had driven all thoughts of the young shepherdess from his mind, or that he enjoyed the dinner of tough flapjacks and bacon quite as well as he had his lunch on the day previous. But he was not greatly disappointed when she failed to show up, for she could not be expected to neglect her own affairs every day just to bring appetizing lunches to a stranger in whom she could have little interest.

And his experimental engineering was not yet at an end. He was eager to get back to it. In the afternoon he started a line that would bisect the little valley if extended. When he was beyond the last weathered shack of the old town, he stopped and cast up his figures. To his utter surprise, he found that he was nineteen feet below his starting point, less than seven feet above the water hole. Less

*Dan looked up to see, not a man riding toward him, but a very pretty girl, clad in riding breeches and khaki shirt.*

than a hundred yards farther and he must reach that level, though to the eye it appeared to be slightly upgrade.

"And I would almost have sworn that this was ten feet higher than that first place I tried," he declared aloud. "Must be that the rim rock being higher on that side makes it look like the ground sloped down that way instead of away from it."

This startling discovery had filled him with a sudden fever of eagerness. If the valley floor really sloped that way, he could reach a lower point much more quickly by going back and running another line from the water hole, this time toward the segment of rim rock opposite the first. He had not gone far on this third line radiating from the water hole when he discovered that his surmise was correct. To the eye, the ground appeared almost level, but his instrument told another tale. Almost from the beginning, the ground dropped away six or eight inches for each ten feet of horizontal distance. Dan stopped every little while to cast up his figures, and when he had gone some two hundred yards and had dropped into the head of a dry wash, he was not surprised to find that he was just twenty-eight feet below his starting point, and, for the first time, had reached a point lower than the surface of the spring.

Dan wondered that he had not seen that little wash before. He could readily trace the course of it, where the water from infrequent rains had coursed across the valley toward the dried lake bed at the other end. The wash followed around the base of the slope near the low rim, and it was easy to see that at least half of the valley was lower than the point he had just reached.

With the thrilling satisfaction of the man who sees gold of his own finding, Dan threw up his hat and shouted. He did not, at that moment, take into account the prodigious task of digging a narrow canal, thirty feet deep at the beginning, part way through solid rock; or that the stories told about the inexhaustible fountainhead of water might be greatly exaggerated. It was enough to know that half of his land was really below the level of the spring in the rock-bound basin. That meant that irrigation was possible; there would be rows of trees and fields of alfalfa. Peach Spring would no longer be a misnomer.

Even the excitement of his discovery failed to keep Dan awake long that night, and, when it was light again, he was going over the ground again, verifying his figures. He extended his line, and proved beyond a doubt that more than half the area of the little valley would be under a ditch that would swing around in a long curve from the point of outlet at the head of the dry wash.

"I wish——" he began, but he did not name the thing he wished. It might perchance have been that he wished his old uncle might witness his success. As a matter of fact, thoughts of his kinsman had not entered his mind for hours. What he most devoutly desired at that moment, was the opportunity to tell the news to a certain little miss with blue eyes, who had a remarkable knowledge of the habits and welfare of sheep.

Dan went so far as to sweep out the room in the old tavern with a broom made of greasewood shoots, bound together. He tidied up things as well as he could, and, just at noon, he set the coffeepot to boil. While he sliced bacon, and a hundred times thereafter, he lifted his head to listen for the welcome sound of bleating sheep. This was their day to water at Peach Spring. He loved the noise they made, he told himself. Incidentally, the herder would be with the sheep, and when he told her about his discovery she would not be so disappointed to learn that there was only fool's gold in Uncle Daniel's prospect pits.

But the hours dragged by on leaden feet, with neither sheep nor shepherd in the offing. In sulky silence he ate his belated dinner of bacon and cold flapjack, left over from breakfast. The hot coffee burned his mouth, and he dashed the offending liquid to the ground, cup and all. For the first time, he took into account the labor and expense of digging a deep outlet from the water hole, and his enthusiasm of the morning dropped to zero. After all, he reasoned, he had no assurance, other than rumor, that the spring would furnish any great amount of water. He couldn't afford such a costly experiment. It had been interesting at the time, but he would be tramping back to Rawhide behind his burro in another day.

And all because a girl hadn't driven her sheep to Peach Spring at noon!

Dan wouldn't admit, even to himself, that it made the slightest difference. Why

should she come, to be sure? Their chance meeting was a mere incident in her life—in his, too, for that matter, he assured himself. He attempted to convince himself that he was pleased to be alone, so that he might think over his problems the better; but his mental argument fell flat. He was clearly in the dumps.

It was late in the afternoon when he descried a dust cloud; and a moment later a horseman came into view, riding down the slope beyond the water hole. He wondered who it might be. Some cowboy, perhaps, for there must be cattle as well as sheep in the country. At any rate, the advent of a stranger promised a little diversion. There was a genuine satisfaction in talking, man to man, with a fellow creature.

And the next minute, his heart gave an excited bound, for, when he looked up, he saw that it was no man at all riding toward him, but a very pretty girl, clad in riding breeches and khaki shirt, booted and spurred, and wearing a broad-brimmed hat. She was even lovelier, as she sat her mount with rhythmic grace, than she had been in the rôle of shepherdess.

The sight of her sent the blood in Dan's veins pulsing quickly. His hopes and enthusiasm went soaring. He forgot his doubts and misgivings of the last few hours. His world was a lovely world, indeed; and he didn't mind a bit if the sheep were out of the picture. He called to her before she reined in her horse, and there was a lilt of happiness in his hail.

"I found it—solid gold and no end to it," he shouted gayly. "I guess Uncle Daniel's nut was put on right, after all."

His gayety left him when he saw a sudden look of disappointment instead of a smile on her face. She stopped, but made no move to dismount. She opened her mouth to speak twice, her lip trembled uncertainly, and she began with an effort.

"But—but your uncle was—was crazy—about the gold, I mean," she faltered. "I'm sorry now that I told you about the prospect holes. I didn't mean to play a trick on you. It was fool's gold, just fool's gold. It was silly of me, and I'm sorry that I——"

Dan had stood, wide-eyed, at the beginning, but he interrupted her with a burst of genuine merriment.

"So that's the answer," he chuckled. "Why, I knew all the time it was fool's gold, and I was busy feeling sorry for you when you got onto the joke. My gold mine is up yonder, one of 'em, but the other is there."

He pointed to the water hole and explained quickly about his discovery. Her smile came like a burst of sunshine through the clouds. She swung from her horse and came toward him with outstretched hand.

"I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "I always had a feeling that the old place wouldn't be deserted forever. I had faith in Peach Spring, too, and rows of trees will bring as much life as rows of houses would have done."

"And your sheep, where are they, little Bo-peep?" he asked as they turned toward the old tavern.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. José, the Mexican herder, came back yesterday from his brother's funeral, and he has a way of handling the sheep as he pleases, when he is in charge. You see, I was only a substitute for a few days."

"I suppose I should be sorry José's brother died, but I'm not," he replied, with an admiring glance at his companion.

And while they ate their supper by the light from an outdoor fire, the flickering blaze lighting their eager faces, it came into his mind to ask her:

"Why did you tell me about those old prospect holes, and have me digging away there for the better part of two days?"

She made no answer, but the ways of woman are devious. After a moment she asked a question of her own.

"And that other gold mine? You said there was another, besides the water hole."

She read her answer in his shining eyes.

# The Wolf and the Mouse

By Howard E. Morgan

*One against fifty did the Wolf Man fight; but wolves have fangs, and the man was well-named.*

Illustrated by Frank Tinsley

AT all times, the Reverend Joe Pedderson had a nose for trouble, and now, he knew something was wrong at the Bitter River settlement, before the *Nancy Lou* turned her snub nose into the tiny harbor. There was no visible evidence to bear out this trouble hunch; even if there had been, the Reverend Joe's nearsighted eyes would not have discovered it.

After delivering its only Bitter River passenger into a kayak, manned by a swarthy native, the *Nancy Lou* backed noisily way, leaving the dismal Alaskan barrens, the little settlement of Bitter River, and the Reverend Joe Pedderson, behind.

The Reverend Joe spread his short legs far apart to keep his feet out of the water in the bottom of the boat, removed his glasses, and squinted jovially into his companion's face.

"How are you, Pierre? And how is Mrs. Beaudaire? And is there a new baby?"

Pierre Beaudaire shrugged his thick shoulders and essayed a grin, which attempt was a dismal failure. "All good, and the new baby come last mont'. But we got trouble here, m'sieu—bad trouble for sure."

The Reverend Joe's wrinkled face registered polite interrogation. "You don't tell me, Pierre? Why, I thought this little boiling pot of Scandinavians, and French, and Russians, and Eskimos, and mixed breeds, at Bitter River, got along together, famously. As a matter of fact, I nearly passed you by, this trip. Dear me, what would you children do without me? First it was a famine, then the influenza epidemic, and now this. Don't tell me it's influenza again, Pierre?"

The breed shook his head, violently. "No, no! Not influenza. Worse than that!"

The Reverend Joe clucked, sympathetically. Withal there was a gleam of excitement in his little blue eyes.

Joe Pedderson lived an active life, and an adventurous one. His circuit comprised the entire territory of Alaska. Having traveled something like fifty thousand miles, here and there about his arctic domain, the Reverend Joe had met with a great many adventures, and, despite his size, his mildness of manner, and the nature of his vocation, he enjoyed these adventures. Trouble was his middle name. Wherever there was trouble of any sort, there, sooner or later, Joe Pedderson might be found.

If the Reverend Joe owned allegiance to any one creed, no one in Alaska knew what that creed was, or, if they did know, they had long since forgotten. Joe Pedderson was not a preacher; his mission was to help, and help he did, every one and any one, regardless of creed or circumstance. There was not a settlement,

not an isolated cabin from one end of Alaska to the other, where the Reverend Joe Pedderson was not a welcome visitor. The handful of mixed breed trappers and fishermen at Bitter River were all his very good friends.

Pierre Beaudaire, in particular, was one of the Reverend Joe's stanchest supporters. The breed was usually quite talkative; now, however, he said not a word. The Reverend Joe wondered vaguely at this. If there was trouble here at Bitter River, why did not Pierre Beaudaire volunteer to tell him about it?

"Evidently this trouble does not amount to much," the little man muttered, just loud enough so that he was sure Pierre heard him. Then, in a somewhat louder voice: "You were joking with me; is that it, Pierre?"

"No, m'sieu. I do not joke; but this ees not my trouble; eet ees everybody's trouble." The breed waved a hand, vaguely indicating the entire settlement. "An' she ees bad trouble, very, very bad. Something I think, even you, m'sieu, cannot help."

The Reverend Joe puckered his thin lips and whistled softly to himself. "Is it then a secret, Pierre, that you do not care to tell me about it?"

"No, m'sieu, eet ees no secret. But the men of the village are in meeting now; I weel take you before them and they weel tell you the story. There ees much I do not know. I was away for long time; many things happen while I am away. When I come back, they do not tell me all."

Joe Pedderson nodded understandingly. Evidently, whatever this trouble was, it was something that the people at Bitter River were somewhat ashamed of. Pierre Beaudaire was honest as the day was long, and absolutely fearless in his convictions. Apparently, something was going on here which would not meet with Pierre Beaudaire's approval, if he knew what it was all about.

The Reverend Joe asked no more questions, but the instant the kayak nosed into the gravelly beach, he started swiftly up the narrow pathway, without waiting for Pierre.

Not more than twenty log shacks comprised the little settlement of Bitter River. The cabins were built close together in the form of a deep half circle. On three sides, the village was bordered by a high picket fence. On the fourth side, a sheer wall rose perpendicularly for about fifty feet, sloping away at that point in a long, gradual decline to the bed of Bitter River a mile distant.

Pierre Beaudaire overtook Joe Pedderson, a short distance from the crude stockade. "Better maybe, that I go first, m'sieu. Maybe they not so glad to see you. But I make them glad. Me, I go first. You come along."

Pierre Beaudaire led the way straight to a big square building in the center of the town. This building, the Reverend Joe knew, had been built several years since, as an accommodation to the various missionaries, who, from time to time, visited Bitter River. The missionaries were never taken very seriously and never made much progress with their preachments. However, it spoke volumes for the simple friendliness of these honest folk, that they had gone to the trouble of constructing a building, merely as an accommodation to these various journeyman preachers, whose doctrines they did not understand and did not want to understand.

Pierre Beaudaire pounded on the door of the big square building; the door was evidently locked. Joe Pedderson wondered at this, for locked doors were almost unheard of in Alaska. A guarded voice called in French asking what was wanted. Pierre announced himself in no uncertain terms. The door swung inward, and Pierre Beaudaire entered, followed by the Reverend Joe Pedderson.

There were a dozen men grouped about a big, handmade table. The Reverend Joe bobbed out from behind Pierre Beaudaire's broad back. "Greetings, my friends," he smiled, "and may I intrude upon this solemn conclave?"

His little bespectacled eyes peered pleasantly about the half circle of dark faces. He was greeted cordially in several tongues, but instantly he had a feeling that this cordiality was, in some cases at least, forced. Another thing he noticed in that first quick glance, which, at the time, appeared in a relatively unimportant light was that the faces of several of the men were scarred and battered, as though they had recently engaged in a free-for-all fight of Gargantuan proportions. No ordinary

fistic encounter could have wrought such havoc on the leathery visages of these hardy sons of the wilderness.

The Reverend Joe was not certain of the wholeheartedness of the invitation contained in the mumbled replies to his query; but this was a minor consideration. These people, his good friends, were in trouble of some sort, and, even though they did not seek his assistance, he would help them, as usual.

With their heads together, several of the men talked, low-voiced, in Russian. The hybrid Russian spoken here was one language the Reverend Joe did not understand. He resented this secrecy, but he did not show it.

"And what is this unpleasant thing, my friends, that you are ashamed to discuss with your brother?"

After a bit, Amlik, head man of the village, answered him. Amlik was head man, due, not to his superior mental equipment, but to his unusual physical strength.

As Amlik talked, the Reverend Joe noticed that Amlik himself was in a far worse state of physical disrepair than any of the others.

"It is not that we are ashamed, my brother," Amlik began, "but we come here to plan the death of a man. We know that you do not believe in such things, and so, there were those among us who felt that you should be kept in darkness as to our purpose; but I have persuaded them to let you sit in our council. Nowadays, it is bad to kill a man. The law will come, and there will be much trouble for all of us. Perhaps there is some other way out of our difficulty. We have decided to tell you of this trouble of ours. Never yet have you failed to help us. Maybe you can help us this time."

The Reverend Joe sensed a note of uncertainty in Amlik's labored pronouncement, and he shrewdly guessed that the village head man had been persuaded to speak thus, by some of the more level-headed members of the council.

The little man cleaned his thick-lensed spectacles with a red bandanna handkerchief. "I await your story, my friend," he said, and he perched expectantly on the edge of the rough-hewn chair, which had been constructed to accommodate a man three times the Reverend Joe's size.

The explanation was left to David Le-Marque, a young Cree Indian, who had been educated at the mission school at Juneau.

"Our council has to do with Ivan Kosloff, my brother," the young Indian began. "'The Wolf Man,' he is called; he is indeed a wolf, in the body of a man. This wolf in human form, came to Bitter River in the fall. From the first, he was an ugly, unfriendly creature. We could not have him here; our women and children were afraid of him. Sight of him was enough to send the children whimpering to the shelter of their mothers' skirts. And he was a very bad man, for sure. Fight, fight, fight! Always was he looking for the fight. Always did he suspect that we were scheming against him, which, as you know, was not true, my brother. All men are free to come and go as they will at Bitter River; but this man, this wolf, he did not understand. No man was his friend. He hated every one, everything; and all the time would he fight.

"He built a cabin up there on the hill. We offered to help him build that cabin, but he did not understand. He thought we came to rob him, and he drove us away. After that, we let him alone.

"In the winter, his cabin was swept away by a snowslide. We had known that this would happen; we had tried to warn him before he built it, but he would not listen. Still, when his cabin was swept away, he accused us of having started the slide which took away the cabin. As a result, there were many terrible fights. The situation became so bad that we feared to visit our traps in the hills, alone. Always, three or more of us traveled together for protection from this beast.

"Throughout much of the winter, this pest was away a good deal of the time. He set a trap line, running far back into the hills, and he followed this trap line, using a team of dogs. He was away much, and we breathed easier. We always knew when he was at home, because of the howls of his dogs. Terrible dogs these were, my brother—sons of the wolf without doubt, as ugly and vicious as their master.

"Lately, since the snows have been gone and since he no longer has his dogs for company, the feud between this Ivan Kosloff and our peaceful little village, has broken out again. Matters have grown steadily worse and worse, until to-day, my

brother, we meet here to decide upon a sure method of ridding ourselves of this monster, this Wolf Man, who renders our lives miserable."

As David LeMarque talked, the Reverend Joe Pedderson listened, eyes wide, doubting from minute to minute that he was hearing aright.

"Amlik, who has suffered most at the hands of this brute, counsels that we kill him," David LeMarque continued. "Amlik is not alone in his opinion. We are all agreed that it would be a very good thing indeed if this ugly beast would meet his death. But there are those among us who hesitate to approve of a killing. As Amlik says, the law officers would come, and although the man who actually killed Ivan Kosloff would not be found, Bitter River would get a bad name, and we would no longer have the many visitors, who are willing to pay such handsome prices for our furs. No news travels so swiftly, or reaches so far, as bad news. And so, my brother, we fear to kill this man; but something must be done. What shall we do? Will our little brother with the glass eyes give us the benefit of his wisdom?"

The Reverend Joe's thin face was wrinkled with perplexity. Here, indeed, was a peculiar situation, and a serious one. He did not doubt David LeMarque's story. These simple folk did not lie. Still, he had a feeling that there was something lacking, something that David LeMarque had not told him. He knew better than to ask questions. If these men knew something they did not care to tell, no amount of the most skillful questioning would serve to loosen their tongues.

The Reverend Joe finally cleared his throat and peered over his glasses at the attentive faces across the table.

"Without doubt, you are confronted by a serious matter, my brothers," he said, "and I commend your good sense in taking the matter under advisement before acting. To kill this man would be wrong, of course. Something else must be done. I will see this Ivan Kosloff."

A chorus of protests followed this announcement. The dark, stolid faces came alive—alive with fear for the fearless little man whom they all loved as a brother. Amlik rose to his feet. "You cannot go. It would be suicide. This Wolf Man would kill you, surely."

Amlik's sentiments were echoed by every man in the room. The Reverend Joe Pedderson smiled.

"You forget, my brothers, that I am not a fighting man. Surely this Wolf Man would not attack a man who comes to him with only peace and good-fellowship in his heart?"

There was a great shaking of heads. "You do not understand," the barrel-chested Amlik bellowed above the babble of protest. "This Kosloff is not a man, he is a wolf. And even if he himself did not kill you, he has a dog—only one dog, now—but this dog is not like other dogs, for it is a wolf in size and disposition. No man can come near Ivan Kosloff's cabin, without being attacked by this vicious beast."

The Reverend Joe pursed his thin lips in a soundless whistle. "Certainly, this Ivan Kosloff must be a most unpleasant person," he muttered.

Pierre Beaudaire pushed through to the Reverend Joe's side. "Eef Joe Pedderson say he weel call upon thees Wolf Man," Pierre announced, "most assuredly he weel do that thing—you all know heem well enough to understan' that. And so, when he go to see thees Ivan—I weel go with heem. I have yet to meet thees Wolf Man, face to face. I would like to do so. I do not fear heem. Pierre Beaudaire fears no man."

Again there was protest. "No one man is a match for this Ivan Kosloff," David LeMarque said. "We all know of your great strength, Pierre, and of your splendid fighting qualities. This is one of the reasons why we have all acted together to keep much of this matter from you. We knew that you would insist upon meeting this Wolf. You have a wife and a family. You are the best trapper at Bitter River. We all love you, and so we have tried to keep you and this Wolf Man apart; for, despite your great strength, Pierre, most certainly he would kill you. No, if our little brother insists on talking to this brute, we all will go."

Noisy assent greeted the young Indian's suggestion.

The Reverend Joe Pedderson came to his feet, and lifted his right hand for silence. "I read your thoughts, my friends," he said soberly, "and I am bound to you more strongly than ever by this proof of your friendship. However, this matter must be settled, without bloodshed

if possible. I will go, alone, and see this Ivan Kosloff and talk with him. If I am unsuccessful in what I have in mind, other plans will be tried. Only as a last resort must there be violence of any sort. Do not fear for me. I will be quite safe. A wolf will not attack a mouse, you know."

Again there were protests; but Joe Pedderson knew these simple people. He did not convince them; he did not try to; but an hour later he started out in the direction of Ivan Kosloff's cabin, alone. He was not armed. None knew better than the Reverend Joe, himself, that he could not have used a gun if he had had one. His nearsighted eyes would not have permitted it. Anyhow, his mission was one of peace; and the little man was not afraid. He was tremendously excited, though, excited with a healthy curiosity to see and talk to this curious person who had succeeded in terrorizing an entire village.

Conscious of the anxious stares of many pairs of eyes, the Reverend Joe clambered nimbly up the twisting, rocky pathway toward Ivan Kosloff's cabin. A thin streamer of blue smoke, trailing skyward out of the cabin's chimney, indicated that his prospective host was at home.

The Reverend Joe did not see the dog until he was within twenty paces of the cabin. The little man did not fear dogs; the ugliest Malemutes in Alaska invariably recognized him as a man different from other men. In Canada, the splendid old Jesuit priests are safe, due to their gentle calling, from the hordes of ugly dogs that hang about every settlement. So it was with Joe Pedderson. Still, never before had the little man seen a dog like this one. The beast was a giant among dogs. It was almost black in color. Its little, almond-shaped eyes gleamed redly, as it advanced slowly to meet Joe Pedderson.

The little man stopped and thrust both hands nonchalantly into the pockets of his mackinaw. The dog stopped too, less than a rod away, and filled its nostrils with the scent of the fearless stranger. Fearless, Joe Pedderson undoubtedly was. If there had been the slightest indication of trepidation in Joe Pedderson's heart, the dog would have known it, and, in a matter of seconds, the beast would have been at the little man's throat. A dog's actions are guided by the emotions of its friends and enemies, alike. It recognizes love or fear, by scent. Joe Pedderson was not afraid.

Finally, he started forward. "Hello, pup," he said. "Is your master home?"

He spoke in a low voice, casually, calmly. The dog made no move. Joe Pedderson walked straight ahead until his coat touched the black beast's pointed snout. "No, I'm not going to walk around you, pup," the little man said. "If I do, you're apt to think I'm scared, and may tackle me. I'm going to stand right here, you see, until you back up. And I'll just wager that you're going to back up. Now what do you think of that? First time in your life, maybe; but you're going to do it this time!"

The big dog smelled the Reverend Joe over from head to foot, even sniffing loudly within a scant two inches of the little man's exposed throat. Still, there was no hint of fear in Joe Pedderson's heart. He did not move. "Come, come, pup! We can't stand here all day. Go lie down like a good boy."

For a long minute, the beast's little three-cornered eyes stared up into the man's blue ones. Then, its bushy tail moved ever so slightly. It turned right about and lay on a pile of dry grass beside the cabin.

The Reverend Joe advanced and pounded on the cabin door. The door swung inward, suddenly, and Joe Pedderson grinned into the black-whiskered face of Ivan Kosloff, the Wolf Man. He continued to smile, even after the ugliness of the giant man was thoroughly impressed upon him.

In appearance, Ivan Kosloff was certainly as much beast as man. It was his face, however, that contributed most realistically to this hideous comparison. His head was huge, and literally covered with curly black hair. This hair covered his face from forehead to chin-tip, only a narrow space across the middle of his forehead being devoid of hair. From out this mass of whisker, peered a single eye, soft brown in color and curiously out of keeping with the man's savage appearance. A three-inch scar cut downward through the other eye, leaving a deep, ugly gash where the eye had once been. The man was short in stature, thick-bodied, and reminded the Reverend Joe of a gorilla; his long arms hooked inward, hanging loosely, almost to his knees. The reason for his unpleasant

nickname, the Wolf Man, was clear, the moment he opened his mouth: his teeth were white, and long, and pointed, unpleasantly suggestive of the teeth of a wolf.

Ivan Kosloff looked his visitor over from head to foot without speaking. Then he peered outside the door to where the big dog lay, head on paws, apparently asleep.

"Juss, my dog, let you come, did he? He didn't bother you, eh?" The big man spoke good English. His voice was low and smooth, curiously out of keeping with his ugly looks. There was no animosity in the Wolf Man's bearing; but there was a world of wonder reflected in his single eye.

"You are a good man, then, like the priests," he finally said. "And what do you want of Ivan Kosloff?"

"I just want to talk with you for a few minutes, Ivan," the Reverend Joe said mildly.

"You come from down there?" The Wolf Man gestured with a scornful motion, toward the Bitter River settlement.

"Yes. But my mission is one of peace," the little man hastened to add. "I have heard their story, Ivan; but there are always two sides to every story. Now, I want to hear yours."

The Wolf Man ponderously considered this. Then he nodded slowly in understanding, and backed into the cabin.

"All right," he said. "Come in. I'll tell you anything you want to know. But ——" The Wolf Man's whiskered face suddenly became hideous. He spread his two hairy hands out, clawlike, before Joe Pedderson's face: "Nothing you or any other man can say, or do, will matter. When Ivan Kosloff is wronged, he does not forget."

The Reverend Joe moistened his dry lips, uncertainly. He breathed easier when the big man turned as abruptly away and motioned him hospitably toward a bunk along the wall, which bunk, outside of a rough table and a scooped-out cedar chunk, was the only article of furniture in the room.

"They hated me, those people, from the day I first arrived," the big man began, simply. "The women feared me. The children mocked me. The men cursed me. And, I ask you, what would you do under similar conditions? I am a man. I do not like to be mocked. No man shall curse me without being taken to account. There were good trapping grounds here, and I did not choose to go away. While I built my cabin up there on that upper slope, they pestered me. I drove them away. We fought. Again and again we fought. I enjoy to fight. There are strong men down there. We had many good fights. But they did not enjoy it. No, they hated me more and more. And then, they killed my dogs."

Joe Pedderson sat suddenly upright. "They killed your dogs! H'm! Tell me about that, Ivan."

"There were ten of them," said Kosloff, "bought with my hard-earned money from Terry O'Flynn at Virgin City. I loved those dogs; and certainly there was no finer dog team in Alaska. In the early fall, before the snows, I traveled far back in the hills, accompanied only by Juss, determining where I should set my trap line in the winter. I left the rest of the dogs here, securely locked in a yard surrounded by a high fence.

"Just before the big snows, I became lost, back there, and was gone nearly a month. When I came back, the dogs were dead. They had been shot. They told me, down there, that the dogs had gone mad, so that they were afraid all other dogs, and even the people themselves, would be affected by this madness. And so, they killed all of them—all of my dogs but Juss, which was with me."

The Reverend Joe Pedderson was as close to anger as his mild nature would permit.

"And I will be revenged upon them," the Wolf Man continued, quickly. "My dogs were *not* mad. They had been for a long time without water, that was all. I was gone longer than I had intended, and had not left enough provision for them, but they were not mad."

The Reverend Joe nodded. "Yes, yes, of course," he agreed. "That was all. Nine out of ten of the so-called mad dogs, are merely thirsty. Poor devils!"

"You admit they were wrong, then, in killing my dogs?" asked Kosloff eagerly.

"It most certainly looks as though they were wrong, Ivan."

"And you also agree that I am right in my desire to be revenged upon them?"

"No, I wouldn't say that," said Joe Pedderson firmly. "Things are bad enough

now, Ivan, and will only be worse if you persist."

The Wolf Man swore and sprang to his feet. "It is just as I thought!" he shouted. "You are a friend of those people down there. You have come to try and get me to go away. I will not go, and I will be revenged upon them. Already, my plans are formed, and nothing you or any other man can do, will keep me from carrying out this thing which I have in mind."

The Wolf Man stood, towering above Joe Pedderson, his ugly face grimacing with rage. The little man did not look up. He sat, staring thoughtfully into the fire.

"I'm not going to argue with you, Ivan," he said at last. "I understand your position thoroughly. Still, I hope that you won't do anything about this vengeful plan of yours, until I see you again. This is all I shall ask of you, Ivan. Will you promise me to keep away from Bitter River for, say, two weeks?"

The Wolf Man hesitated. Then: "I will promise nothing."

The Reverend Joe shrugged, and came to his feet. "I'm sorry, Ivan," he said, "because all of this is due to many unfortunate misunderstandings. The people down there at Bitter River, *are* my friends. They are good people, good friends. It is not in their hearts to harm any man. They call you the Wolf Man; but you are not bad. They should be your friends. You should be their friend."

"Yah! You are wrong," the big man snarled.

"You have failed to understand them, and they have failed to understand you," the Reverend Joe continued, unperturbed. "I will talk to them. When I talk to them, they listen, Ivan. I will convince them that you are not the bad man they think you are. It will remain then, only for you to meet them halfway. Will you do it? Will you help me?"

"No!"

Again the little man shrugged. "It is too bad," he muttered. "But even though you won't promise me, definitely, Ivan, will you not seriously consider putting off the culmination of this vengeful plan of yours for a short time—two weeks at the most? At the end of that time I think I will have a surprise for you."

"I will promise nothing."

"All right, all right. It's too bad, Ivan; I'm sorry you don't trust me."

The Wolf Man did not speak. He followed his visitor, as the Reverend Joe trotted across the big room toward the door.

Without looking around or speaking again, the little man trudged thoughtfully down the rocky pathway toward Bitter River.

It was dusk, and Bitter River was at supper. In order to avoid the curious

*There was a deafening explosion, and the Reverend Joe had a vague sensation of being carried through the air.*

eyes that he knew would be looking for him, the Reverend Joe entered the little stockade surrounding the village by a back way, and went immediately to Pierre Beaudaire's cabin. The big Frenchman's eyes lighted with relief when he saw the Reverend Joe standing there, alive and well, in his doorway.

Joe Pedderson halted the flood of questions which he knew would be forthcoming, with upraised hand. "I'll tell you all about it later, Pierre," he promised. "Just now there is an errand I want you to do for me. Can you start for Terry O'Flynn's, immediately?"

"Yes," Pierre Beaudaire said wonderingly.

"Very well. You must start at once. Tell Terry that Joe Pedderson wants nine of his best sled dogs. You won't need any money. Terry thinks he is indebted to me for a small service I did him a few years ago. He has many times offered me the pick of his best dogs. I have never had occasion to take advantage of his offer; but now the occasion has arisen, and you must hurry, Pierre. Nine of them, remember, and the best dogs in Terry's possession, which means the finest dogs in Alaska. You must be back here within two weeks, at the very latest."

Pierre Beaudaire shrugged his broad shoulders, doubtfully. "Two weeks very short time," he commented.

"I know. But you can do it, Pierre. *You must do it!*"

"All right. Eef eet must be done, I do eet, somehow."

And leaving the better part of his supper untouched, the big Frenchman swiftly threw his pack together and hurried away.

In the days that followed, Joe Pedderson offered no explanation of his talk with Ivan Kosloff. He evaded all questions. The Reverend Joe knew these simple people; none better. They were united in their hatred of Ivan Kosloff, and nothing he could say would change them. Some thought-provoking, big, melodramatic act, which they would all understand, would better serve to clear up the situation than all the wordy arguments his fertile mind might evolve, combined.

Only once did the Wolf Man put in an appearance. One day, a small trading schooner weighed anchor in the little harbor. Ivan Kosloff visited the boat, and, after some bickering with the captain, came away with a heavy parcel wrapped in oilskin. The Wolf Man handled this parcel gingerly. Joe Pedderson observed and wondered. After Kosloff had gone on to his cabin, the little man went out to the boat. The captain was a Russian, known as "Red Top," on account of his fiery red hair and beard. The Reverend Joe knew Red Top, well.

"What was it that Ivan carried away with him so carefully, Red Top?"

The big Russian fidgeted, uneasily. "Sorry, but I can't tell you, Joe."

Joe Pedderson did not push the point. He climbed back into his little boat and rowed slowly back to shore.

Next morning, some of the people who had been up and about during the night, reported having seen a light, like a huge firefly dancing about the hillside between the settlement and Ivan Kosloff's cabin. The people had but one explanation of this phenomenon: the Wolf Man was hatching up some new deviltry. The women, in particular, were afraid, and, for the first time, began to actively urge their men to get rid of their unsavory neighbor.

Joe Pedderson was worried. He well appreciated the power that women can exert when once they are aroused, and now they were stirred deeply by those two all-powerful emotions, fear and love. In this case, love for their children and husbands, was combined with fear of the Wolf Man. Where the men, if left to their own devices, angry though they were, would probably listen to his plea to prolong the inevitable for a few days, nevertheless, if urged by their women, these same men would be deaf to his most earnest entreaties.

When, on the two succeeding nights, the strange light continued to be seen on the rocky wall which bordered the little village on its northernmost side, Joe Pedderson realized that he would be unable to keep the men of Bitter River in hand much longer. The two weeks were nearly up. If Pierre Beaudaire did not meet his schedule to the day, Ivan Kosloff's life would be forfeited.

The men neglected their work. They gathered in little groups here and there, talking, heads close together. When the Reverend Joe appeared, they would disperse quickly. For the first time in his

life, the little man was at a loss. He visited the Wolf Man, but found the cabin deserted and the door bolted shut.

The fourteenth day passed, with no sign of Pierre Beaudaire. The night of the fourteenth day, the Reverend Joe was aroused from a fitful sleep by a commotion in the street. Through the window, he saw many men, all armed, moving slowly, cautiously, toward the hills.

The little man dressed with frantic haste and stumbled out into the street. From one to another of the men he went, arguing, pleading. Finally, he assured them that the Wolf Man was not at home. Only the evening before, he had called at Ivan Kosloff's cabin and found it empty. This last argument had the desired effect. None of the men had thought far enough ahead to find out whether the man they sought was at home. "Just one more day," the little man begged, "just one more day. When Pierre Beaudaire returns, then I will have a solution of your trouble."

Reluctantly, sullenly, most of the men returned to their beds. Several of them, headed by Amlik, stood around, talking excitedly in Russian. Although the Reverend Joe could not have come close enough to hear what was said, even if he could have understood their lingo, he followed the men closely wherever they went. "Remember, I have your promise, Amlik," the little man repeated again and again. "You promised to wait one more day."

These men respected the Reverend Joe Pedderson, and, each time, they assured him that they had agreed to wait; but the Reverend Joe was nervous and afraid. They would not, when in a normal state of mind, break their word; this Joe Pedderson knew. Still, they were childlike, tempestuous people, and, in a sudden burst of anger, all promises might be forgotten.

Just as the pale sun was slanting up over the eastern hills, there sounded a jingle of bells, and a man's hoarse voice calling commands to his dogs. Bedraggled, leg-weary, a gaunt-faced, hollow-eyed skeleton of a man, Pierre Beaudaire staggered into the little stockade, followed by nine, footsore, snarling, Malemutes.

Even as the Reverend Joe shook the big Frenchman's hand and breathed a prayer of relief, he noted with practiced eye the splendid quality of those nine dogs. Never had he seen finer animals. Almost black were they in color, full-bodied, strong, splendidly conditioned. Certainly the pick of Terry O'Flynn's Malemute kennels. The Reverend Joe placed the babiche lead rope in Amlik's hand. Then he addressed the small group of men which had collected about.

"These dogs, my brothers, are for Ivan Kosloff! They are a gift from the people of Bitter River."

Big Amlik took the lead rope, reluctantly. "They were mad, those dogs," he protested, feebly.

"You know what you say is not the truth, Amlik," Joe Pedderson snapped.

"They frothed at the mouth," Amlik pursued.

"To be sure they frothed, for there was no water," said the Reverend Joe. "They had been without water. Did any of you think to give them a pail of water? No, you killed them. Because of your animosity toward Ivan Kosloff, you killed them. You were glad of the chance to do him this harm, and you were wrong, my brothers. The dogs were not mad, and well you knew it. And so you must make amends to Ivan Kosloff. He thinks you hate him. The gift of these dogs will prove to him that he is wrong. Come, we will take them to him."

And so, while the rest of the little village still slumbered, Joe Pedderson, followed closely by Amlik and half a dozen men scattered out behind, started up the rocky path toward Ivan Kosloff's cabin.

At the bottom of the slope, the Reverend Joe Pedderson went on, alone. "You had better stay here," he said. "Ivan may think that we come on an unpleasant errand. I will get him."

But the Reverend Joe did not reach Ivan Kosloff's cabin. Halfway up the slope, he came face to face with the Wolf Man. Even in the half light, Joe Pedderson's weak eyes could see plainly the maniacal glare which distorted the big man's face. The Wolf Man's hands and face were covered with dirt; his clothes torn and dirt-smeared. His ugly face was twitching, and there was the will to murder in that single glaring eye. The Reverend Joe went about the business in hand, just as though he had not noticed these things.

"We have a surprise for you, Ivan. Come with me!"

Ivan Kosloff repelled the little man's tentative tug at his sleeve.

"The people of Bitter River have a gift for you, Ivan," the Reverend Joe explained. "They admit they were wrong in killing your dogs. They have procured more dogs for you from Terry O'Flynn. Beautiful dogs, Ivan. Nine of them. Come, come with me. They are waiting for you, down there."

The Wolf Man's body tensed. The maniacal rage left his whiskered face, to be replaced by wondering amazement. He looked down at the Reverend Joe Pedderson, then down the slope to where Amlik stood with the dogs. "You spoke truth, then, my friend," he said at last. "These people must be my friends. Probably some foolish one among them killed my dogs. Yes, that probably is so, for now they buy me more dogs. And from Terry O'Flynn, you say?"

And then, as abruptly, the expression on the Wolf Man's face changed again, as horror was written plainly there. "What have I done?" he cried aloud in anguished tones.

Stunned into inaction for the moment, Joe Pedderson saw Ivan Kosloff turn suddenly right about and start running at full speed diagonally across the rocky slope, leaping from boulder to boulder like a mountain goat.

As soon as he recovered his self-possession, the little man followed as fast as his short legs would permit. As he ran, an acrid odor came to him, which, at first, he was unable to identify.

Finally, he caught sight of the Russian. The big man was clawing frantically with both hands at the hard ground, following a tiny streamer of blue smoke, which seeped up through the gravelly surface of the hillside. In the half-darkness, the Reverend Joe's nearsighted eyes could not follow Ivan Kosloff's movements, accurately.

When he had about reached the big man, however, the latter again started running, pointing straight down the hillside this time, and thence up the short slope to the top of the rocky wall which overhung the Bitter River settlement. Here, at a certain spot, the big man again started digging at the rocky earth. Frantically, he worked, heaving and tugging, lifting great boulders half as big as his body, and throwing them aside. As he ran, the Reverend Joe noticed that the streamer of blue smoke, trickling up through the gravel, moved rapidly down the hillside toward Ivan Kosloff.

And then, suddenly, the meaning of it all was clear. A fuse! Gunpowder! The Wolf Man had planted a charge of powder up there on top of that rocky wall above the town; and he had laid a fuse for several hundred feet back up the slope. It was this gunpowder which the Wolf Man had gotten from the Russian ship several days previously, and which he had handled so gingerly. Directly above the town, the charge had been placed. Down there, the little village was still sleeping—men, women and children, fifty of them; and they would be buried under tons of rock! The whole village would be buried!

Horror lent speed to Joe Pedderson's shaking legs. He joined Ivan Kosloff where the latter was tossing huge boulders this way and that out of a jagged hole on the clifftop. The little man worked at Kosloff's side, adding his own wiry strength to the Russian's herculean efforts. Through eyes dimmed with streaming perspiration, Joe Pedderson saw that little streamer of smoke draw near. He left the hole which Ivan Kosloff's efforts had already dug, and started pawing at the gravel in an effort to unearth the fuse. But the gravel had been hard packed above the fuse, and when he finally clawed away the surface soil above the spot where he expected to find the fuse, he discovered the streamer of smoke had passed him, and that his efforts had been in vain.

Once again he joined Ivan Kosloff. Just as he tumbled into the hole beside the big man, Kosloff unearthed three corrugated containers filled with blasting powder. He thrust them into Joe Pedderson's arms. "Take them away quickly!" he ordered. "There are others, and I must find them. Hurry, hurry!"

Joe Pedderson did as he was bid. When he returned, Ivan Kosloff was burrowing like a mad thing in the shifting gravel at the bottom of the hole. As he toiled, he cried out, vague, unintelligible cries, like a beast in torment. "One more, one more, there's one more," he repeated, again and again. Then, "It is too late!" the big man fairly screamed.

Just as the Reverend Joe would have again joined his companion in the search for that last tin of powder, Ivan Kosloff sprang to his feet and ran. As he passed,

the Wolf Man caught Joe Pedderson with one arm. Then there was a deafening explosion. The Reverend Joe had a vague sensation of being carried upward through the air. There was a jarring impact, and then darkness.

When he struggled back to consciousness, the Reverend Joe Pedderson found himself lying on a soft blanket, couched between two concave boulders on the hillside. The morning sun shone brightly down into his face. He struggled up on an elbow, squinting to clear his dizzy eyes. Near by, Ivan Kosloff lay. The Wolf Man was injured. He was stripped to the waist, and two women were working over him with a basin of warm water and many bandages.

All about were many people; the entire population of Bitter River. Foremost among these was Amlik, still leading the nine dogs. Farther up the slope, a huge hole had been torn in the mountainside. But the little village down below was unharmed. The Reverend Joe felt himself over tentatively and breathed a sigh of relief when he found that he was uninjured. David LeMarque came near. "He, Kosloff, saved your life, my brother," the Indian lad explained. "His body was between you and the explosion."

"Is he hurt badly?" inquired the Reverend Joe anxiously.

"Yes. But he is a very strong man. He will recover," David replied, smiling at the Reverend Joe reassuringly.

Even as the Indian spoke, Ivan Kosloff groaned and opened his eyes. For an instant he stared wonderingly about at the half circle of sympathetic faces; then his single eye flitted toward Joe Pedderson, and finally came to rest on the dogs. He smiled.

"You give me those dogs, my friends?" he queried, weakly.

Amlik came forward. "They are yours, Ivan," Amlik said, "and we are your friends."

The scene was beginning to circle meaninglessly about before Joe Pedderson's eyes. There was a sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach. He was not badly hurt, he knew. He was just sick, that was all. He fought against the faintness. He saw the Wolf Man and Amlik shake hands. Then, with a happy sigh, he closed his eyes, and, smiling, lay back on the blanket.

# Six Ox-power

It is customary to regard the locomotive as a time and money-saving factor in modern industry, but in Navasota, Texas, the switch engine has given way to teams of Texas longhorn steers, as a measure of efficiency.

In 1873, H. Schumaker established, in Navasota, the first cottonseed oil mill in the Southwest. At that time, oxen were the only means of conveyance for taking the seed to the mill, and for getting the oil to the market. When the railroad reached this town, switch tracks were run out to the mill, but it was discovered that much time and money were lost in waiting for the locomotive to do the switching, after pulling its string of box cars into town, once or twice a day.

As a remedy for this, oxen were set to moving both empty and loaded cars to and from the loading platforms at the mill. They proved perfectly capable of performing the work, and, furthermore, they were always at hand when needed. J. J. Piper, superintendent at the mill, says that ox-power is the most economical power he can obtain.

These beasts of burden are fed cottonseed meal, and seem to grow fat on their work. One yoke, in which each steer weighed about two thousand, two hundred pounds, was able to handle, alone, a box car. Teams of six or eight animals manage loads of from fifty to one hundred tons without difficulty.

For some forty years, Jim Brown has been driving the oxen. Jim Brown, who is an old negro resident of Navasota, understands the truly sensitive temperament of his oxen. He drives without harness, the only rein being a rope tied to the horns of one of the steers. And under his guidance, these beasts render for modern industry a service, which, for efficiency of time and money, the modern steam engine was not here able to equal.

# The Texan

## By George Gilbert

*"Bill!" Orrie spoke firmly, and her eyes blazed. "What's wrong? You've never acted like that before."*

Claude Werrel, banker of Two Bar, engages the services of Janvers Marsales, bank promoter. Under false pretenses, Marsales obtains a detailed list of wealthy ranchers.

Griswold Newferne, a young rancher, whom Marsales has long hated, is lured to a rustlers' hang-out, doped, and his knife and handkerchief stolen. Marsales' bandit band raids the ranchers on his list. Newferne's effects are found. Leaving only Orrie, Werrel's daughter, at the bank, a posse rides to Newferne's ranch. He soon appears, borne, half-conscious, by his horse.

Meanwhile, the bank is robbed—at Newferne's orders, the bandits hint. Newferne is jailed with Frisco, Marsales' man, who acts the drunken hobo; they fight; the jail burns. One escapes; a charred body and Newferne's effects remain.

The gang awaits Marsales, or El Matador, at the border town, Ruidoso. Frisco, whom no one has yet seen, arrives. He forces the alcalde, who meets him, to summon Mateo, El Matador's first man. He kills Mateo.

### CHAPTER X.

#### WATCH A SIDEWINDER'S HEAD!

TWO cigars glowed through the dusk on the wide gallery of the Werrel house. Indoors, the piano sent forth melodious strains, in accompaniment to the full-throated soprano of Orrie Werrel.

"I'm glad to hear her singin' that way," Werrel said to his companion. "It shows she's throwin' off the depression she got into, after Gris Newferne threw us all down. Do you know, Marsales, in spite of his beating me in that horse trade, and refusing to bank with me, and bucking me in other ways, in business, I had a sneaking liking for that young chap, up till the time he turned out so bad."

"He seems to have had many likable qualities," Marsales agreed. "I've talked with men in town about him, and they all say that his going bad was a complete surprise to them all."

"Still, it had to come out," sighed Werrel. "I'm glad it came out before Orrie got tangled all up with him. It would have been a hard blow to her pride, if she had been engaged or married to a man that turned out bad and got burned up in jail that way, with guilt all over him."

"Yes, the situation has some bright sides. Then, too, you've recovered yourself as a banker pretty well."

The piano's music ceased.

"Yes, that's so. But you've helped me. By putting in your cash money, that two thousand, you gave me my first big deposit after the raid and my losses. That gave people here a new hold on their good opinion of me. Knowing that a man connected, like you are, with those big-town bankers was willing to throw in with me, stopped any signs of a run on me. It let me have a chance to call in some investments in railroad stocks and bonds and gave me capital to use in the bank again. It was a hard loss, but, thanks to your advice, I've weathered that storm all right; and the raid scared people into hot-footing it in for safe-deposit boxes. The bank will feel the loss for a long time, but I feel that we've turned the corner. And anything you want of the Werrels, from now on, let me know." Claude Werrel's big, honest hand gripped the hand of the other man warmly.

The shaft of light from the open doorway was darkened as Orrie stepped forward from the door to the place where Marsales was sitting. Reaching down, her hands clasped his.

"And what dad says goes with me, Mr. Marsales. We Werrels pay our debts, all ways and at all times." she said with some feeling.

"It was nothing that I did," came the easy, almost drawling tones of the visitor. "I just happened to be here on business with your father when it all happened, and I remained from a sense of loyalty to one who had been my client. I have really enjoyed my little rest spell and vacation here in this quiet old town. Just to visit with the old-time cowmen who make this their headquarters and to chum with the cowboys that come in is a treat to a man like me. I used to be a cowboy, you know, and then got harnessed into business."

"Orrie, go mix us a drink of something mild and soft," Werrel said.

"All right," said Orrie, starting to go.

"Miss Werrel, how about a ride to-morrow?" Marsales invited.

"Yes, if it's early," she assented.

"I like the morning hours for a saddle treat. I'll be here about six?"

"That will suit me. I have hardly been in the saddle since——" Her voice quavered a bit, then she went out, without completing the sentence. Soon she came back with the tray of mild drinks, and they drank together, Orrie responding playfully to a toast that Marsales proposed to her. Her clear laughter showed how pleased she was at his attentions.

Just at the appointed hour next morning they rode away together, out of the Werrel lane, onto the main trail, and through the town. The blackened ruins of the jail still remained to tell of the tragedy that had occurred there. Riding past the little hillside cemetery, Marsales noted that Orrie did not look at the small headstone erected by the N F outfit over the newmade grave.

The man was courteous and considerate in all things during that first ride. He talked in a way that showed he had knowledge of ranges, men, and cattle; and always he spoke in the best of taste.

An hour out, they saw a man riding toward them, evidently on his way to town. Orrie saw that he let his bridle reins drop back of the saddle horn, leaving his hands free. She glanced at Marsales. His face was smiling, his hand that held the bridle reins was held high, the other was raised in a negligent salute to the approaching rider.

"That's old Burleigh," he said, "isn't it?"

"Yes. He's acting some hostile, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's said some mean things to me in town, but I don't want any quarrel with him. He's on the rampage because Newferne got killed, and he doesn't want to blame the right party, Newferne himself, for all the trouble that came at that time."

"Old Bill fairly worshiped Gris—I mean Mr. Newferne," Orrie corrected herself.

By now they were close to Burleigh who, with knee-pressure, guided his dancing horse around, so that he passed with his head turned toward the two. All this time, Burleigh's reins were loose and his hands free.

"Bill!" Orrie spoke firmly, and her eyes blazed. "What's wrong? You've never acted like that before."

"I never had a reason." The old-timer's lean jaw set tight. He never took his eyes off Marsales.

"I guess you've forgotten your manners? No real man wants to start a row with a woman present," Marsales rubbed salt into Bill's raw wounds of pride.

"My education was not neglected, but in passing a sidewinder, keep watch of his head, is my motto."

By now the horses were at a stand. Bill was between the couple and the town. His voice took on harsher tones:

"I didn't think you'd forget Gris so soon and go riding with the first saddle-dude that came along, Orrie."

"You have no right to talk to me like that," she flared back at the old-time range boss.

"All right. 'A guilty conscience needs no accuser,'" he quoted.

The girl reined her horse around and started away. Marsales followed her and soon overtook her.

"Old Bill is getting too mean to be tolerated," Orrie said, giving utterance to her rising anger over the incident.

"Oh, those old range dogs have got to have a chance to bark once in a while," said Marsales with a laugh. "Burleigh is all right; he's loyal to Newferne, and I respect him for that. Burleigh is honest and feels bad because of what happened. He is one of those old-timers that would stick to a friend that was a crook, just because of old time's sake."

"That's kind of you, Mr. Marsales." Orrie flashed him an admiring glance. "Another man might have abused Burleigh, after what happened back there just now."

"Burleigh will get over it. Let's forget him and enjoy this glorious morning ride. I'll challenge you to a race to that ridge-top, where the trail turns to the south."

She accepted the challenge, and the wild mood, brought on by the skimming stride of her horse, made her feel that, for the first time, the deep depression she had suffered, since the fire at the jail and the raid, had begun to pass away. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright, as she reined to a pause atop the ridge where the main trail wound away up the valley. Marsales looked at her admiringly.

"If only I weren't so much older than you are," he said softly, "I might say things that would be truthful, but might not please you."

She glanced away, then back at him wistfully.

"I'll say this much," he went on, leaning toward her, "that you're a mighty handsome young woman, and I'm going to ask you to go riding with me again right soon."

"And if you ask and say 'pretty please,' I'll accept," said Orrie with a smile.

"Then I'll say it right now. Pretty please!" Laughingly, he followed her cue.

"Yes, any time. You are so kind—you helped daddy so much. Yes, any time you say, I'll ride with you, sir."

## CHAPTER XI.

### EL DIABOLO.

THE group in the *cantina* had become silent. Buchdell was moody. Sanfredo and Bastin, both loyal friends of Mateo, glowered at him from time to time, and he returned their glowering looks, with full interest. Their talk was in muttered snatches of half a dozen dialects—Indian, Spanish, English.

"Why is Mateo away so long?" Buchdell growled finally.

"He has his good reason," Sanfredo answered quickly.

"Good to him, no doubt."

"You went away for a stroll yourself and no one complained," Bastin reminded him. "Less barking from you, Buchdell, if you please."

"I do not take orders from you," Buchdell flared back.

"No?"

"Not any. I don't mind taking them from Mateo, for he speaks for the chief, but I won't take them from any of you white-livered——"

"*Perro de mala ralea*——"

"Yes, I may be a low-down cur, as you say, but I won't take it from you!"

Their voices had been getting harsher. All in the *cantina* were now aware that the group was riven with a quarrel. Men left that part of the big room, moving hastily, with staring eyes turned backward toward the scene of dissension.

Buchdell sprang erect. His chair clattered down behind him. Sanfredo and Bastin also leaped to their feet, eyes glaring defiance.

"*Hombres bravos,*" a forceful, restrained voice came to them from the rear. "Sit down. Speak softly; our policy is secrecy, not loudness."

They all wheeled to face the intruder. He was pointing to the overturned chairs. His voice was quiet, steel-sharp:

"Is this the way to avoid public notice? Is this the way to obey the chieftain? Come, cease this uproar in a public place."

"Who are you?" growled Buchdell.

"Frisco!"

"The man that was late at Two Bar?"

"Yes, but for a reason that was for the good of all," said the stranger quietly.

"How do we know you are Frisco?" Sanfredo demanded.

"Look upon this!" In his hand a coin was to be seen. It was peculiarly notched on the edge.

"The chief's token!" Bastin said with wonder in his voice. "The one Mateo had."

"He sends it by me now," said the newcomer.

"Where, then, is Mateo?" one demanded suspiciously.

"That is for him to say." The man now sat down at the table. Buchdell and the other two got their chairs and drew up close to him. He ordered refreshments for them all. He parried queries, direct, and indirect, and got them all in a better humor with quick sallies of wit. Finally he whispered, under cover of the music of the native orchestra:

"This is too public a place for real talk. We should meet in secret, out of town, soon. By that big group of saguaros that we passed, coming in."

"Then you came from the north?" Buchdell asked.

"I wouldn't come across the desert, south, would I?"

"No, you were to come from the north," Sanfredo agreed.

"Why is the chief so long?" Buchdell asked.

"He has his reasons. He must arrange, for one thing, to turn paper into gold. It is not every one that can dispose of what is in the cache." His tones were low, but distinct.

The members of the band glanced from one to another knowingly.

"You seem to know all," Sanfredo admitted grudgingly.

"I know enough to serve the interests of all. Buchdell, you will come with me."

"Where?" Buchdell regarded the newcomer with renewed suspicion.

"Where Mateo Trevino is."

"And that is?"

"You will soon see. Follow me." He turned to the others. "Sanfredo, you will meanwhile remain in charge. Avoid all arguments and avoid all who try to get into your confidence."

Buchdell followed Frisco quietly enough, once he had yielded to the impelling dominance of the superior will. Those left in the *cantina* silently watched them go. Outside, Frisco fell in beside Buchdell, indicating the direction he wished him to take.

"Buchdell," he began, "that was really a play to get you away from the others. Mateo wants you to help him in something that has come up, to help carry out some orders that I have brought down with me."

"Oh, so that's it?"

"Yes."

"Be careful how you talk; this town's alcalde has spies everywhere," warned Buchdell.

"As to that, do not be alarmed; we are going to his house," replied Frisco.

They were now before the house of Bustamente, with its high dobe walls, its white-columned doorway and portico. Buchdell started to draw back, but Frisco grasped his arm firmly and urged him in.

"We put pressure on the alcalde this time, Buchdell," he said. "Mateo wants you and me to come to him. It is all arranged for in the chief's plan."

"Has the chief arrived, then?"

"Yes."

And now they were at the wide portal. It opened and Buchdell would have drawn back, but Frisco hurried him inward, and soon they were in the patio.

On the bench sat Bustamente. No one else was to be seen. The little fountain tinkled coolly, and a mocking bird sang in the moon-silvered shrubbery. Bustamente did not move as Frisco led Buchdell forward, saying:

"Señor Alcalde, the man is here."

Buchdell stiffened in his pose. Bustamente motioned for him to be seated, but he refused:

"Where is Mateo?" he demanded.

*"Si?"* was the sullen reply.

"It seems you were here earlier to-night, and said things against El Matador?"

Buchdell's face went white. He glared at Bustamente, who looked away, then lighted a taper at the lamp and set a cigar to going.

"What did you have in mind, Buchdell?" persisted Frisco.

"I—that is Bustamente wanted information, and I refused it."

"Yesterday you began to think to yourself that you would like to get all the loot in the cache for yourself," pursued Frisco. "On coming to Ruidoso, you planned, within yourself, to see the alcalde

*The alcalde and his men raided the "cantina," appearing suddenly and causing a furore all around the plaza.*

"Do not worry about Mateo," came the level tones of Frisco at his side. "Concern yourself with what is said to you, here and now."

"What does this all mean?" He whirled half about to face Frisco.

"It means this! Sit down!"

Frisco's gun leaped from somewhere, thudding against the other's short ribs with telling force. Buchdell's hand, halfway to his own gun, came away empty, and he put his hands up, slumping down, himself, in obedience to another sharp order from Frisco. Frisco took Buchdell's gun and stuck it into his own belt.

*"Hombre bravo,"* he said quietly, "it is time we had a talk."

here, and get his protection in turning the American bonds into cash, as that is something that every ragamuffin cannot do. You thought you saw a signal that Señor Bustamente made. You came here to propose treachery."

Buchdell's very hair seemed to stand on end as he half staggered erect, his eyes glaring proof that Frisco had read his mind aright and had estimated correctly his plan of action.

"They call you Frisco," he said in awed tones. "It should be El Diabolo!"

Frisco smiled sardonically. He jabbed the gun against Buchdell's waistline and ordered him to sit down in the chair again. Buchdell sank limply down. All his bra-

vado was gone. At a sign from Frisco, he arose and marched before him. Bustamente followed, directing Frisco into the house and through some passageways leading to the right wing. Here they paused before a strongly studded door that Bustamente opened with a large key. Inside were a small cot and a chair; the walls were blank, and of brick.

"This is my private calaboose," Bustamente remarked tauntingly. "You will be safer in here than outside, perhaps."

"I do not understand," Buchdell said, trying to draw back, but the strong arm of Frisco impelled him into the little cell room. There he was searched completely, in spite of his vehement protests and threats to kill his jailers if he escaped. Once he snatched at the gun thrust into Frisco's belt, but a quick snap of the wrist and a blow foiled this attempt at re-arming.

Buchdell sank down on the cot, still voicing his rage at his two captors:

"I'll get you both! You're playing with fire. What will El Matador do about this? He will get word to the big political chiefs and then something will happen in this little corner of this big country!"

They left him, Bustamente double-locking the massive door. In the patio, the fountain's tinkling was clear; the wind brought the sweet scent of the flowering shrubs to them. They sat on the long seat, where Bustamente had been sitting earlier; the lamp, on a small table the servitor had brought, threw its beams on what they examined. Frisco turned the various articles over, commenting upon them.

"Bits of quartz, false opal, an Indian charm, a knife, a gold pencil, a hollow shell, with a fitted cap of gold—loot he has saved. Let us see, here is a locket. In it is a bit of folded paper. That must be it."

"If it agrees with the half that we found in Mateo's watchcase, all will yet be well," said Bustamente.

"*Si, señor!* Here is what we found on Mateo," said Frisco. "When I lay out close to their camp fire, night before last, and heard them talk of their cache and of how it had been marked, and the sketch-map divided between two of them, I wondered which of them had it. It seemed reasonable that Mateo, as leader, would have part of the sketch-plan, but who had the other, with knowledge of how to find the cache, by use of the sketch? When Buchdell was known to me as one who seemed to wish to deal with you, but who backed out, I guessed that he had the other part of the sketch-map, and so it turns out."

"Then when you said you had read the mind of Buchdell, and knew what he was thinking of, it was merely a shrewd guess at what would be passing in the mind of a dishonest man?" inquired the alcalde, admiringly.

"*Si, señor.* Now, we have the two halves of a sketch-map. What does it show?"

Together they bent over it, each seemingly equally intent. But Bustamente raised his head furtively from time to time, glancing toward the doorway leading into the patio from the house. The moon had now tipped far over toward the west and the mocking bird sang no more. Frisco went on:

"A trail, leading through the mountains. A side-canyon. A note, on the side of the map telling that the side-canyon entrance is very narrow, a mere slit in the rock. A niche in the base of the wall of the side-canyon forms the cache, that is covered over with loose rock, under the shelter of the niche's roof and is inclosed in a well-oiled slicker."

Frisco's head was now low over the map. Bustamente saw the door inch open and the face of his old servitor appear, drawn and white, in the slit. Bustamente shook his head and the servitor withdrew softly.

"And now, where is that canyon?" Bustamente asked.

"From talk I heard while spying at their camp fires, I think I can locate it," replied Frisco.

Now Bustamente's eyes gleamed.

"But even if we get it, what of El Matador?" Frisco asked.

"Yes, that is the point. If he were without power, merely a local bandit, it would be one thing, but with his power and the terror his name inspires, it is another," said Bustamente doubtfully.

"You can pass off Mateo's death as an affair of the police. Mateo became drunk, had a quarrel, was found dead in an alley. That would perhaps satisfy El Matador. But Buchdell? He is alive."

"He need not be," was the sinister reply.

"No? There is one thorough way out of this, Señor Alcalde."

"And that is?" urged the alcalde.

"El Matador will come. When he does, he need not return."

Their eyes met. Bustamente's were terror-filled; those of Frisco cool and still in their inner depths.

"He need never come here," continued Frisco. "His route will be down through the mountains, and if he fails to come, who will inquire where he is, for a long time. Then his name will be partly legend. El Matador, alive and at the head of a mysterious organization, is one man; El Matador dead, his organization broken, will be another. And perhaps, secretly, those in higher places will be glad that he is gone."

"That is possible," assented the alcalde, watching Frisco fold the two pieces of the sketch-map carefully and tuck them into his pocket. "We can go into this matter on an even chance, half for each?"

"*Si, señor,* half for each."

"You will need an escort to the cache?" Now, Bustamente's eyes were like those of a serpent.

"*Si, señor.* Come yourself, with several trusted aides."

"And we can start?" urged Bustamente.

"At dawn."

"*Si, si!* And the others of El Matador's band?"

"Leaderless, they can do little," Frisco assured him. "Sanfredo and Bastin are the most to be feared. With Mateo Trevino and Buchdell, the American, gone, they will not be worth considering."

"I can have Sanfredo and Bastin handled by my private *bravos* or turned over to the rurales, on some charge," suggested the alcalde.

"*Si,* let it be as you say, Señor Bustamente. And now I must go to the others of the band with some tale that will keep them satisfied. They must not become alarmed and send word back to El Matador that will alarm him in turn and make him come here, or cause him to call together some of his other bands for a raid."

Frisco got up. Bustamente did the same. Frisco started for the door leading from patio to house, and it was then that the alcalde coughed.

"It would seem, señor, that we forget something," said he.

"And that is?" inquired Frisco.

Bustamente's tones were soft, purring: "You have all of the sketch-map."

"*Si?* What then?"

"As we are to share, half and half, should not we share the map between us?"

"That is fair enough," agreed Frisco, producing the halved map. "Here, take half."

Bustamente took the bit of paper and put it into his pocket. Then he sat down again and Frisco went out.

The instant the man had gone, Bustamente clapped his hands softly and went into the passage. To the old man who came, Bustamente whispered: "Have that man followed and report to me."

Then he went back into the patio again and unfolded the bit of paper, holding it to the brilliancy of the lamp. He threw the bit of paper down with a hoarse cry:

"Duped! He shifted the papers on me. He has all of the map and I nothing! I must raid the *cantina* and take him and all the others of the band. But what story will he tell them? I must go there, with some of my men, at once."

He went through the house rapidly and to the street, walking toward the barracks of his local guard.

Ten minutes later, he and his men raided the *cantina,* appearing suddenly and causing a furore all around the plaza. But the men he sought were gone. They had gone out quietly long before. His shadow reported that Frisco had disappeared in the winding alleys of the town and was lost.

None of his men knew what the object of all this was. Bustamente whispered some phrases about "a political raid," and that satisfied them. Bustamente started back toward his own house, puzzled and frightened. He had the death of Trevino to explain to El Matador, he reflected, and the imprisoning of Buchdell to explain, as well. He resolved to make a complete search of the town and territory during the night and to act on whatever information he had, with the coming of the dawn.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE GIANT SAGUAROS.

AS Frisco and Buchdell went out of the *cantina,* Sanfredo leaned over the table about which the remaining members of the band were assembled, and whispered:

"He said to meet amongst the giant saguaros. He seems to know all our ways. It is there we have often met when close to town, and when we did not wish to be seen."

"Yes," the stoop-shouldered Bastin agreed, "he has the token, as well. But I would rather it were Mateo Trevino giving the orders."

"He must have a reason; Bustamente has not acted friendly since we came into town," Travinado reminded them.

They glanced about uneasily and finally got up and walked out, around the place, and to the stables. In a few moments they were riding cautiously through the town's twisty back lanes and goat paths. They had taken all their equipment with them, on the advice of Sanfredo, their acknowledged leader.

They circled the town, riding quietly through the still, moonlit hours. On the levels, to the north, they entered the intricacies of the giant organ cactus growth. For a time, the cactus seemed to become closer together, and thicker, then they opened out into a little dale, wherein nothing grew. The moon came through the big cactus fully, the black, scanty shadows of the leaves falling with twisted grace.

They bunched their horses around some big rocks at the center of the little dale, letting the bridle reins fall. They stretched out for a nap, sleeping soundly, for they feared nothing in that place. They depended upon the horses for warning, should any one approach.

The moon swung up and over. Cactus owls called, and the odor of giant blooms made the air heavy and sweet. Then one of the horses stamped and snorted. At once the border wolves were awake, glaring about apprehensively, then gaining control of themselves and awaiting with patience the approach of the lone rider whose horse's hoofs now could be heard in a shufffing walk, such as progress among the cactus called for.

Frisco rode silently up to the group and swung down.

"You did well to come here; the town is in an uproar," he told them. "Bustamente has turned venomous for some reason. Mateo and Buchdell have gone on the mission El Matador planned for them, and which he sent me to start them on from Ruidoso. There will be rich loot from that, later. As for you, we are all to ride back and meet El Matador on the trail."

"Why?" Sanfredo asked. "Tell us why, Frisco."

"He wishes to have us show him the cache, so he can get those gringo bonds cashed in some distant city above the border."

They whispered among themselves, while Frisco waited till they had discussed this new set of orders. Bastin spoke suddenly:

"But we cannot show him the cache."

"You must know where Mateo Trevino and Buchdell turned aside to make it?" suggested Frisco. "They were told off to hide the loot. Little of it is of value, it is true, unless to a man who can negotiate with banks and through crooked dealers in jewels in the Gold Coast cities."

"You seem to know all the details. Did Mateo tell you?" Sanfredo asked.

"He and Buchdell. El Matador trusted them fully, it seems."

"*Si,*" Bastin agreed, "but we can not show you where the loot is cached. We had nothing to do with that."

"In any event, we must get away from Ruidoso, *compadres.* Ride with me. By the morning we can we well among the canyons to the north. We can get food at some ranch, and game in the mountains. When El Matador comes, he will make all things easy for us. I do not relish this responsibility of leadership, but must do as ordered."

"Did you come down on our trail?" Sanfredo asked.

"No, I lost it soon after leaving Two Bar. There has been rain, you will recall. But I had my orders where to ride. I came into Two Bar afoot, but my horse was outside the town. I left him outside, and walked in with a blanket roll, as if I were but a vagabond gringo."

"And where are we to meet El Matador?" Sanfredo demanded.

"Yes, we need to know that," Bastin chimed in, and the others growled agreement.

"I think near the end of White Cliff Pass."

"You think?"

"He said he might be there. If not, I am to go to another place. A messenger from him may meet us on the way."

"How?" insisted Sanfredo.

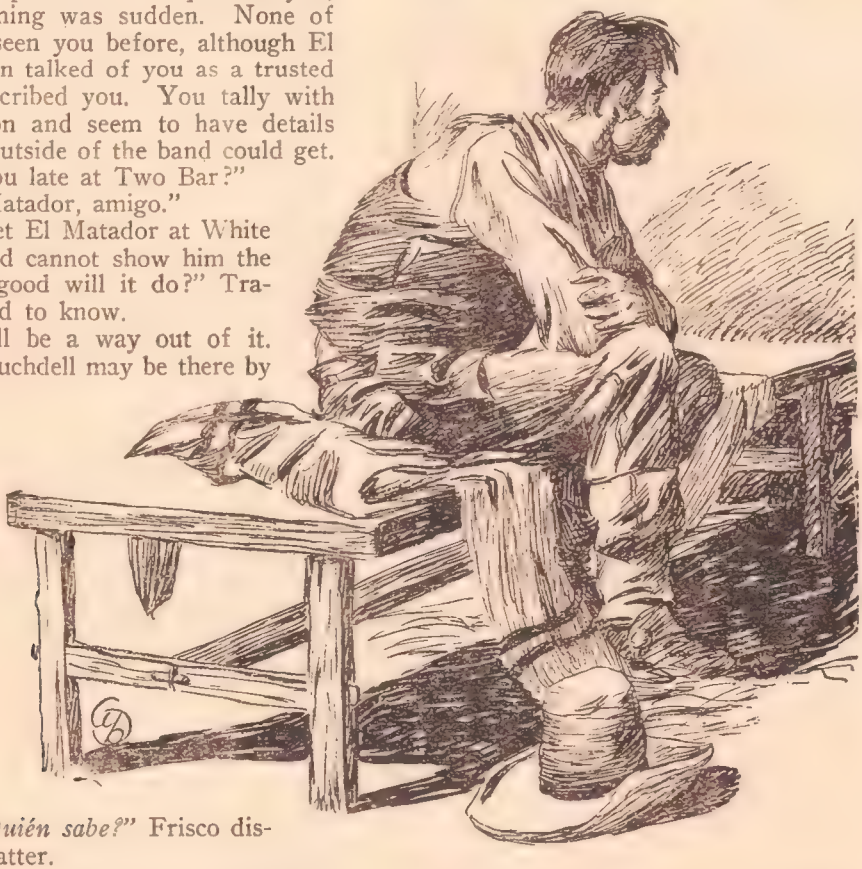
"How do El Matador's messages go and come?" was Frisco's quick reply. "You get one at night or at dawn; one is shoved under your door if you are at home, or left in your boot if you sleep in a dry camp where you think you are seen by no one."

"Yes, that is so," Bastin admitted. "You will be patient as we question you, for your coming was sudden. None of us has ever seen you before, although El Matador often talked of you as a trusted man and described you. You tally with his description and seem to have details that no one outside of the band could get. Why were you late at Two Bar?"

"Ask El Matador, amigo."

"If we meet El Matador at White Cliff Pass and cannot show him the cache, what good will it do?" Travinado wanted to know.

"There will be a way out of it. Mateo and Buchdell may be there by that time. *Quién sabe?*" Frisco dismissed the matter.



"We had thought to rest in Ruidoso, after our long raid," Bastin grumbled, "and spend the money from the loot. Ruidoso is a good place to live between raids. El Matador and Bustamente seemed good friends always."

"Bustamente is the friend of the man who makes it profitable for him; he envies our chief his prestige and prosperity," Frisco said, as he swung to his horse. In a moment they were all riding after him, in single file, through the lanes of the giant cactus. Sanfredo, who forged ahead of the others when a wider lane opened out, came abreast of Frisco, who leaned over in the saddle and whispered:

"You are the one fully trusted, Sanfredo. We, together, will get the cache from the little box canyon; do not let the others know."

"It seems, then, that you know where it is and that you got this information from Mateo?" inquired Sanfredo.

"You know as well as I do where I got it from, Sanfredo," returned Frisco.

"I know that Mateo told me he had a map of the place, but where the place is, I do not know."

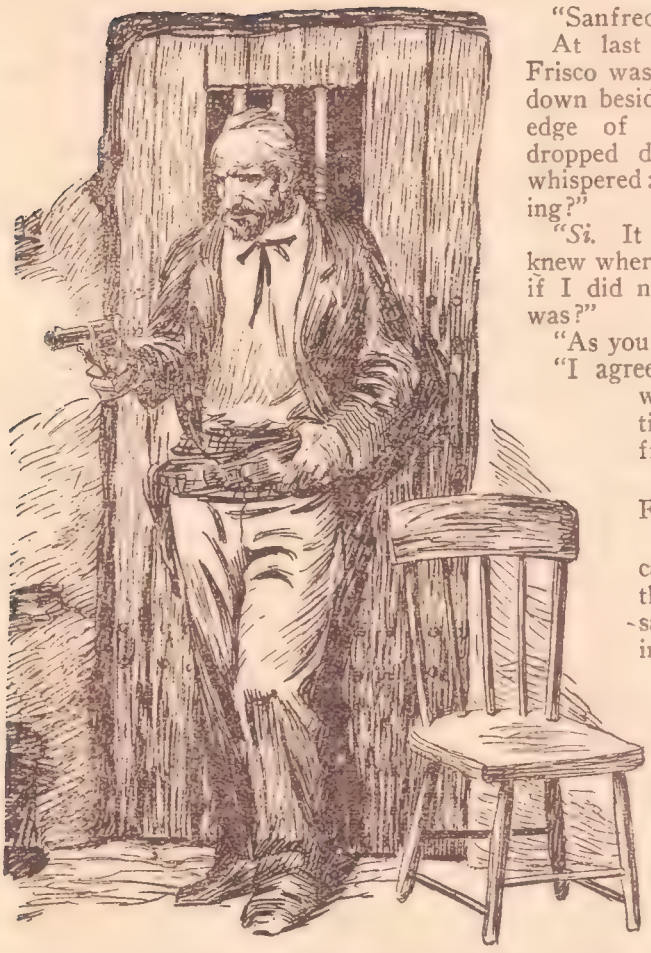
"It seems we are at cross purposes?" said Frisco with an inquiring look.

"I do not understand what you are talking about," said Sanfredo, with a shrug.

"Come, let us make better time! We are in the open now," said Frisco, as they passed from the shadow-barred saguaro thicket to the open country. "There will be time enough to talk this all over on the way into the canyon country."

Now the band rode at a swinging gallop, the tough, desert-bred horses eating into the miles rapidly.

Dawn found them among the higher



*Bustamente put his back against the door, and held the gun on Buchdell unwaveringly; neither of the men spoke.*

hills, leading toward the mountains. The canyon winds shouted around them as the cold air sucked up through the passes with the draft as from a furnace, draining heat out of the warm levels below.

At their morning camp, Frisco sat apart a bit from the others, smoking, after a cold bite from his saddlebag. The others had odds and ends of food—cheese, sausage, crackers, small lumps of sweet chocolate. These served to lighten the burden of hunger.

Frisco watched them, without seeming so to do. He rolled and unrolled a bit of paper between his lean, strong fingers, as if it were a wrapper for a cigarette. He opened it up again, in his slender, strong palm and glanced at it. It was the pieced map. On the edge were the words penciled, in Spanish:

"Sanfredo knows!"

At last Sanfredo came toward him. Frisco was silent as Sanfredo at once sat down beside him. Frisco let him see the edge of the paper. Sanfredo's jaw dropped down with surprise as Frisco whispered: "You know Mateo's writing?"

"*Si.* It seems, then, he told you that I knew where to turn off for the cache, even if I did not know just where the cache was?"

"As you see."

"I agree with you, and will tell you where to turn off, on one condition, Señor Frisco," offered Sanfredo.

"And what is that?" asked Frisco.

"That I go with you to the cache. I am one of the oldest of the band of El Matador. He saved my life once, twice, thrice, in earlier years, and I am faithful to him. It is not regular, the way you have come with us, yet you have the token and have answered all questions."

"Oh, as to that, I was going to ask you to come. You are to take charge of the loot in the cache, until El Matador arrives, once we have it."

"I am to go with you?" Sanfredo's voice was eager.

"Yes, and take charge of the loot."

"After you have handed it to me, out of the cache?" Sanfredo's eyes were veiled with cunning, although his thick lips twitched.

"Yes, of course. You will go with me and take the loot, that will be rolled in a well-oiled slicker," agreed Frisco.

"That agrees with what Mateo told me. I agree, then. I am to tell you where Mateo and Buchdell turned off to hide the loot?"

"Do that and come with me. Once given the clew, I can find the place, Sanfredo. Believe me, you will be doing a great service to the chief."

"Yes, perhaps in more ways than one." With a deep-chested chuckle, Sanfredo got up and gave a private signal to the others who exchanged smiles, as Frisco finished smoking a cigarette.

That done, he gave the command, and they swung to the saddle again, taking a trail that led them farther and farther into the fastnesses of the inclosing mountains.

Frisco was ahead of them, around a turn in the trail, when Sanfredo signed to the others. They bunched around him momentarily, and listened closely to his low-voiced words.

"He has the map," said he. "Mateo gave it to him. So far, it is plain sailing for him. But let him take the stuff from the cache! Frisco is terrible with a gun, but once he reaches for the cache, under the rock where Mateo told me it was, he will be terrible no more. We will get the loot for ourselves. Mateo is gone and Buchdell, the killer, is not with us, the chief is absent; it is our first chance to strike out for ourselves. A friend of mine will buy the bonds and gems."

"Yet we have to fear El Matador," Bastin reminded him.

"Yes, if we stay in the North. But in the far Southern States of our country, a band like ours, with money to buy the best of guns, and ammunition, and a machine gun, could prosper, Bastin."

"You have large ideas, Sanfredo," said Bastin admiringly.

"Larger than will let me be always under other men, however powerful and successful, Bastin," returned Sanfredo. "We have all talked of our cherished plan many times, when Mateo and the killer gringo, Buchdell, were away from us. It has been understood that we would act for ourselves when the chance came. Mateo came to trust me, and he selected me as the one to know part of the secret of the cache, so that if he were killed by some accident of the trail or fighting, El Matador could still have a clew to his cache. Buchdell knew, too. This man, Frisco, got the map from Mateo. Let Frisco open the cache. If he does, he will be terrible with his guns no more."

"What more do you know?" Bastin asked, wonderingly.

"Wait and see." Then, as Frisco could be seen, reined in to await their coming around the farther bend of the winding trail, Sanfredo went on, in still lower tones:

"He is cunning, ruthless, a killer, as we have heard. The chief has used him many times for harsh, fierce work. Yet this time he will be helpless. Let me be to him as a trusted *compadre;* let him be what he will be after he has put his hand to the cache to open it."

"Why did not the chief have the loot taken to Ruidoso, as always?" Travinado asked.

Sanfredo raised a warning hand.

"Hush! He may overhear. The chief may have suspected that that pig of an alcalde would not be friendly—the chief knows the hearts of men."

"He may not let us get away, if we are false to him," suggested Travinado.

"Give us several days start, and we will take our chances. Our life is but a series of chances, and no man is sure of his life, at our trade, beyond the rising or the setting of the sun. Hush!" Sanfredo ended the conversation, and rode on ahead.

Frisco greeted them pleasantly, his face clear of all lines of suspicion or anger. As he rode, he seemed to doze in the saddle. Behind their hands the others exchanged grins of expectancy.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### WHERE IS FRISCO?

THE next day after that first ride together, Marsales appeared at the Werrel home, suave, smiling, the handsome courtier in his bearing. He had again taken up his quarters at the Ranchers' Rest, and had spent the evening before in chatting with the old-timers in town about the recent raid. Now he was calling upon Orrie Werrel again, and she rode with him willingly. They rode through town. Orrie stopped at the bank to tell her father where she was going. He gave a smiling approval to the ride with the visitor.

They did not meet any of the N F boys on the trail that day. Once Marsales asked Orrie:

"Did Burleigh have anything more to say to you? He was in town all last night and rode back to the N F only this morning."

"No. Bill did not come to our house in the evening, as he so often used to do when he spent a night in town. I'm glad he didn't, if he's going to act and talk as he did yesterday." Orrie tossed her head.

"So am I. I don't want to get into any row with him, but a man can't take everything and still be ranked as a man."

"No, that is understood." She flashed him an understanding smile.

He amused her with a wealth of stories of his experiences in the cattle trade of former years. Often he would turn the conversation into more personal channels.

"If I were a younger man, I might say something nice to you," he said once.

"Oh, you've said lots of nice things to me," Orrie responded, laughingly.

"Not as nice as I could say."

"I suppose not. A handsome bachelor like you are, has probably said a lot of nice things to a lot of nice girls."

"Oh, why be sarcastic? If I did, I meant them all." Marsales looked at her earnestly.

"Did each girl believe you?"

"Each one seemed to. But, joking aside, I think you're a mighty fine young woman and one that a man could like a lot without trying hard."

"I'm afraid you're somewhat of a flirt, Mr. Marsales," said Orrie with a smile.

Her horse and his own kept time perfectly. He fell silent, leaving her with just that pleasant impression of teasing, pleasing courtship that never became too serious to offend her after her recent sorrow, yet was enough to relieve the tension of her nerves and make her feel that this handsome, successful, man-of-affairs liked her. This subtle play upon the young woman's vanity never went too far, always left something to be expected.

"You have been a wonderful help to dad," she reminded him.

"As to that, it was a pleasure. He is one of the old-timers," said Marsales.

"I suppose that explains it. You men who used to live in the saddle seem to have a fraternal feeling, one for the other."

"That's so, Orrie." Marsales used her first name thus freely for the first time. She did not resent this, but smiled in a way that showed she was pleased at his apparent slip.

"He is getting a big increase in excellent deposits," she went on. "The banking habit is growing on these rich old cowmen all around here, and the bank's resources are growing at a good rate. A couple of good years will repay dad for all he lost, he says."

"Is that so? Well, I'm pleased." He turned his head away to hide the glitter that came suddenly into his deep-set eyes.

They circled back toward the town, parting on the main street, she to ride to her home, he to put out his horse in the Ranchers' Rest stables. There he had a box stall for the horse, with a door opening out behind the stables, as well as the door opening into the front stable yard. He gave the stable lad a shining coin for prompt service, each day, and, in consequence his every wish was anticipated in everything pertaining to the care of his swift, lean trail horse.

Marsales strolled down to where Sheriff Drenane sat before a building that he had taken over to serve as a temporary office and jail. He asked him again a question that he had asked several times before:

"Have you heard anything to-day?"

"Not a thing." The sheriff shook his head. "The rangers didn't get a trace of them, and they seem to have fallen off the map."

"Did they ever find any trace of that tramp that was put in the jail the night Newferne was burned to death?"

"Not a trace."

"A walking man would have been overtaken; he could not have gotten beyond reach of pursuit, it would seem to me," persisted Marsales.

"It's queer," agreed Drenane.

"Did any one report having had a horse stolen? He might have stolen one to get away on."

"None reported missing." The sheriff looked up, suddenly. "Say, you don't suppose that bum was hurt in the fire and then staggered off into the thickets outside of town and died?"

"No one can tell, but he seemed lively enough when he came bursting out of that jail," replied Marsales.

"Sure did. Say, Mr. Marsales, you sure make a hit with folks in this man's town. I hope you're stayin' a while?"

"Yes, a while." The bank promoter smiled a satisfied smile.

"Pretty nice place to visit up at Werrel's?" The sheriff winked and grinned.

Marsales laughed a little and strolled away.

Yet one thought was hammering in his brain, that took the edge from his pleasure:

"I should hear from Frisco. He has kept away too long. I wonder why he doesn't come to me?"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SECRET OF THE CACHE.

IN Ruidoso, Bustamente waited, haggard and drawn of face, for the news his huntsmen brought in. No trace had been found of the band; nothing had been seen of the American vagabond.

Mateo Trevino's body, Bustamente's servant had disposed of in Bustamente's own garden, with no mound over it. The alcalde had told the servant it was an affair of the police, that Trevino was a political spy. The old man, who stayed within the walls of the alcalde's house, thought Bustamente a great man, and did as he was told by his master.

Buchdell, in his cell-like room, raged at first but became quieter toward morning. He slept until well along into the forenoon.

He was aroused by the rattling of chains. He sprang erect, ready to fight for his life if need be, prepared for whatever might come.

In the doorway appeared Bustamente, a drawn gun in his hand. He motioned for Buchdell to sit on the cot; the killer did so. Bustamente closed the door, locked it on the inside, put the key in his pocket, and put his back against the door. He held the gun on Buchdell unwaveringly.

For several minutes, neither of the men spoke, each eying the other closely, each weighing and estimating the other. It was Bustamente who spoke first:

"Buchdell, who is this Frisco?"

"A trusted man of El Matador's."

"Did you ever see him before last night?"

"No," admitted Buchdell. "He has always acted as a sort of spy for the chief, north of the border, giving him news of important affairs, or going on secret missions below the border, but always personally acting for the chief."

"Does Mateo know him?" pursued Bustamente.

"Well," Buchdell assured him.

"Are they enemies?"

"No, friends. They are the two that the chief trusts most. He calls Mateo his right arm, Frisco his eyes and ears. Frisco always shares with us, although he is not with us when we run risk of death or wounds in raids."

"Would Frisco be disloyal to El Matador?" the alcalde asked, scanning the other's face with crafty eyes.

"As soon think that his right hand would fail him, señor," said Buchdell without hesitation.

"Do you know why he searched you?" inquired Bustamente softly.

Buchdell's face was swept with a mounting passion, before which the alcalde, armed though he was, shrank back. Buchdell's voice trembled with rage at the remembrance.

"No! Do you?"

"Why should I?" Bustamente shrugged.

"It was a queer deal. He gets me in your *casa*, he throws down on me, you shove me in here by force, search me and——"

"Softly, Señor Buchdell!" interrupted the alcalde.

"What has gone wrong? You act like a man that had made a bad mistake, or was afraid of something."

Bustamente was apparently in the grip of an inward struggle. Emotion was shown on his broad face, despite his efforts to control himself. Buchdell studied the man keenly. The gun wavered, and Buchdell gathered himself to strike; but the gun came back into line again, steady as a rock and Bustamente's voice took on a firmer ring:

"Yes, I made a mistake. I took Frisco for what he said he was—Mateo's friend. Mateo brought him to my house [illegible]ent away."

"Why should Mateo go away?"

"How should I know? He went away. Besides that, I know nothing of Mateo Trevino. Frisco, he left, saying he desired him to be not seen by the people here, and he hoped he would be safe with me——"

"Then why did Frisco walk through the streets and come to me at the *cantina* of the Three Branches?" interrupted Buchdell eagerly.

"How should I know?" said Bustamente again. "I went from the patio a moment, where he was, and when I came back he was gone. He soon returned, with you."

"Yet, you had a part in what followed."

"As his dupe," Bustamente explained. "Yes, I will tell El Matador that."

"And you do not know where Mateo is?"

Bustamente shook his head decisively,

and the bewildered Buchdell looked at him doubtingly.

"And Frisco has disappeared?" he asked.

"Yes," said the alcalde.

"Well, it all smells like El Matador a mile off. He has some reason for mystifying us all."

"And that is all you have to say?"

"Yes, perhaps. I am remembering something, too."

"What is that?" asked Bustamente anxiously.

Buchdell eyed the man silently for a moment, then answered: "When Frisco brought me into your patio last night he said: 'Señor Alcalde, the man is here.'"

"How, then?"

"As if you had sent for me, or sent him for me," said Buchdell, watching his captor carefully.

"Consider the craft of the man, Señor Buchdell." And now the alcalde's face was lined with new anxiety.

"Yes, consider it," said Buchdell significantly. "There is something here that cannot be pinned down or seen, Señor Bustamente. Come, we are not frank with each other."

"I have told you all. I am afraid I have made a mistake."

"In dealing with El Matador there should be no mistakes," warned Buchdell.

"No."

"Those who make mistakes with him die."

"*Si, si!*" agreed Bustamente nervously.

"I have made a mistake. I let myself be fooled into coming here, then Frisco drew before I could think of it. He searched me. He took something that, for losing, may cost me my life," said Buchdell gravely.

"What was it?" asked the alcalde.

Buchdell held the man's glance firmly. Bustamente let the gun fall to his side. His lips formed a short phrase:

"Suppose I know what it was?"

Buchdell started forward, then drew back as the gun snapped toward him again. He breathed deep, then relaxed:

"You have said either too much or too little."

Bustamente smiled.

Perspiraton dripped from Buchdell's brow. Suddenly he began to shower imprecations upon Bustamente, who continued to smile, as he said:

"Cursing will do you no good, Señor Buchdell. You came to me last night for something. *Why let Frisco have it all?*"

"Do you really think he is playing El Matador and the rest of us false?"

"*Si, señor,* I have been trying to get that idea into your thick skull this past half an hour," said Bustamente contemptuously.

Buchdell turned suspicious again: "But what would he take? You say: 'Why let him have it all?' Explain yourself further."

"Can he get anything of value by acting alone?" inquired the alcalde tentatively.

"Not with what he took away from me."

"He got something from Mateo Trevino when they first met. He said something to Mateo when they first met in my patio, and Mateo handed him a folded paper, a paper a bit yellow, such as might have been around a small package. It was like a paper he took from you, that he found in a locket. He did not show me what the paper was." Each word probed deep.

Buchdell's face writhed into a mask of living fury as the alcalde spoke. Suddenly he sprang to the floor, and beat the air with clenched fists. "He has, then, the map, complete, not half of it. He is a traitor! Yet he will not find it; he does not know where we turned from the trail to make the cache—— What am I saying?" He caught himself up, and ceased speaking.

Bustamente was silent.

Buchdell glared at him; then continued:

"I must be crazy to talk this way before you. You have played a cunning hand to draw me out. But no one will find out what the paper means. Only I and Mateo knew. Mateo is gone, I am here. And you will never find out from me."

"The paper told where to find the cache of El Matador." Bustamente's voice rang out like a bell. "Why let Frisco have it all?"

"How do you know so much? How can I stop him?" asked Buchdell helplessly.

"I am not altogether a fool, Señor Buchdell. Knowing part from what I saw of Frisco's actions, knowing also that El Matador, like other leaders of raiding bands, must leave valuables in a safe place at times, I have guessed at the secret."

Buchdell's face worked with varying emotions, as he realized how he had been tricked. Then: "You think Frisco went away alone?"

"He left here alone," said Bustamente. "The men of your band went away from the Three Branches long before that, my spies have told me. No trace of them has been found."

"Had you had a real sign reader you might have found their tracks. None of your men would relish, much, fighting El Matador's men. They may have lied to you, to save themselves from a fight."

"I have some *bravos* who would not flinch, señor," said the alcalde proudly.

"Perhaps! To return to Frisco, he may be acting for El Matador."

"Then why did he use a gun on you?"

"*Si!* Why?" Buchdell shrugged helplessly. "If Mateo had told me to, I would have given him the part of the map that I held. Did he seem friendly with Mateo?"

"Very!" was the sharp reply.

"I do not understand it. But if Frisco is not really sent by El Matador, there is no reason to fear that his treachery will win him anything. He went alone, you think?"

"Why?"

"The man who goes alone and puts his hand into El Matador's cache will remain there," replied Buchdell ominously.

"How can that be?" asked Bustamente wonderingly.

"Mateo and I set a huge wolf-trap right over the cache," was the answer. "The man who reaches into the hole for what is there will have his hands caught, so that he cannot make a fight, and he will stare into Death's face for hours, before thirst and hunger slay him. If Frisco goes there alone, without El Matador's knowing it, he will remain there till found. So the cache is safe. Mateo and I fastened the trap's chain around a knob of rock, locking it fast, and yet concealing it under loose stuff so it will not be seen."

"You could find the cache without the map?" asked the alcalde anxiously.

"Certainly. El Matador trusted Mateo and myself, altogether. I would never betray his trust. He saved my life once. I do not forget that."

"And yet I thought when you came to me last night you were on the point of telling me something."

"A man's thought is his own, unless he foolishly gives it to another," was the calm reply.

"Señor Buchdell, it may be that I have been made a fool of by this Frisco. I have been fooled this much—I have held you a prisoner, even though not in a public calaboose. If I let you go free, will you join me in explaining to El Matador that it was all a mistake?" The alcalde's tone was conciliatory.

"He does not like mistakes," said Buchdell.

"You will at least bear witness that I had no evil intentions, that I was deceived? I must be at peace with him somehow."

"Yes, on one condition."

"And that is?" asked Bustamente.

"That you let me go at once, that I may seek for Sanfredo, Bastin, Travinado, and the others, without being molested."

"You are master of your own movements," said Bustamente instantly. "In place of the gun Frisco took from you, I will give you a pair of new Lugers and plenty of ammuntion. You may have a horse from my own stable, as a gift."

"Then I will go."

As Buchdell passed out before him, Bustamente smiled a false, quick smile behind his back. But he did not see that Buchdell was smiling, as well.

Half an hour later, Buchdell, armed, and with a good horse under him, rode out of Ruidoso, giving it out that he rode to try out the paces of his new horse.

Bustamente, concealed behind a shrub in the back lane where Buchdell had mounted, pointed him out to a lean, swarthy fellow and said:

"Follow him, with another of my men. Let me know by which trail he leaves and whether he goes toward the mountain or desert. I will have a dozen other men ready to ride in chase. I will take charge of this chase myself; there has been too much blundering in my service since last night, Salazar."

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE WELL-OILED SLICKER.

AFTER a twisting, devious route through the canyon country and over successively higher levels of mesas and upland valleys, the band, now led by Frisco, struck off to the west. Always they rode

quietly, seeing no one, except a few groups at lonely mountain settlements or mixed breed folk on small ranches of goat herds or sheepmen. These were always glad to give them food, even meat, in exchange for tobacco, or ammunition, or small sums of money. Sanfredo, Bastin, Travinado, and the others greeted these secluded folk jovially, smiling at the dark-skinned woman and handsome girls, jesting with the men. There were no towns, no telegraph wires, no roads. The trail always was the bed of some winding canyon, the top of a mesa, the skirts of a desert stretch when they dropped to lower levels.

Finally, in the afternoon, they came to a steady climb, up an even grade. They had left a desert stretch, a desolate trough between widely separated ranges, narrowing to an upsweeping backbone that lifted out of the trough by steady degrees until it merged into a strip of sandy gravel that came trailing down out of a pass leading to higher levels. The walls of this low, winding pass were light in color—almost white.

"White Cliff Pass?" Frisco suggested to Sanfredo, with whom he was riding in the lead of the band.

"*Si.* It is here that we may look for El Matador?" was the reply and counter-question.

"That, or word from him."

"Do you think, then, that he is close at hand?" pursued Sanfredo.

"I have no more idea than you have."

"You wish still to go to the cache?"

"*Si,* to have all ready when El Matador comes," said Frisco.

Sanfredo pretended to look away, as if at something on a distant elevation, and when Frisco looked, also, Sanfredo studied the man's features. He spoke with sudden force:

"Suppose I will not tell where the cache can be found?"

"As you wish, Sanfredo. You can then explain to El Matador," was the quiet reply.

"Then you would not force matters, so that I must tell you?"

"No, you must have a reason that will satisfy the chief, so I will let it go. Of course he will want an explanation that will satisfy perfectly."

Sanfredo's heavy face turned gray. "I was only joking, Señor Frisco," he said hastily. "We are close to the place now where you should turn off."

"*Si?* We will go, then, together?"

"*Si.* The others will watch in the main pass, lest there be pursuit and a surprise."

"That will be best. We can trust them all?"

"As well as you can trust me, Señor Frisco," Sanfredo assured him.

"And that is completely, as you are in high favor with El Matador, and he is a good judge of men and their intentions, Sanfredo. He has a long arm, Sanfredo, always be pleased to remember that." Frisco looked straight at the other.

A shade of fear passed over Sanfredo's face; but it went quickly, and he was smiling, as he said:

"It is now far into the afternoon. We will leave them on guard here and go on ourselves. We will return to-morrow."

"Have them camp just off the pass, that they may be able to watch, without being seen, should any one come we do not care to meet."

"Will El Matador come?" queried Sanfredo.

"That will be as he thinks best. But I think so, or I would not go to the cache," Frisco replied.

"Look around and see if you know where we are to turn off," said Sanfredo suddenly.

"No, I must confess that if there is a way out of here, it is not easily to be seen by merely looking about," was Frisco's frank reply.

By now, the others of the band had straggled up to them. Sanfredo made to them a private sign, and they exchanged smiles. Frisco was peering toward the high walls on either side of the pass. The shadows were gathering in the pass, that ran northeast by southwest.

"Go into that break in the wall; you know how it leads to a retreat where the horses can be concealed and watered amongst the rocks. Camp there till we return in the morning," Sanfredo ordered, and they nodded.

Frisco and Sanfredo rode off together, Frisco in the lead. Sanfredo signed back to the others, shaking out his belt, unseen to Frisco. Bastin, Travinado, and the others waved encouragement to Sanfredo, who signed again to them. Then he spurred up even with Frisco and began to talk easily of indifferent matters. The

curve of the pass trail soon took them from the view of those they had left behind. They became silent, riding at a smart single-foot that ate up the miles.

"How far is it to where we turn off?" Frisco asked.

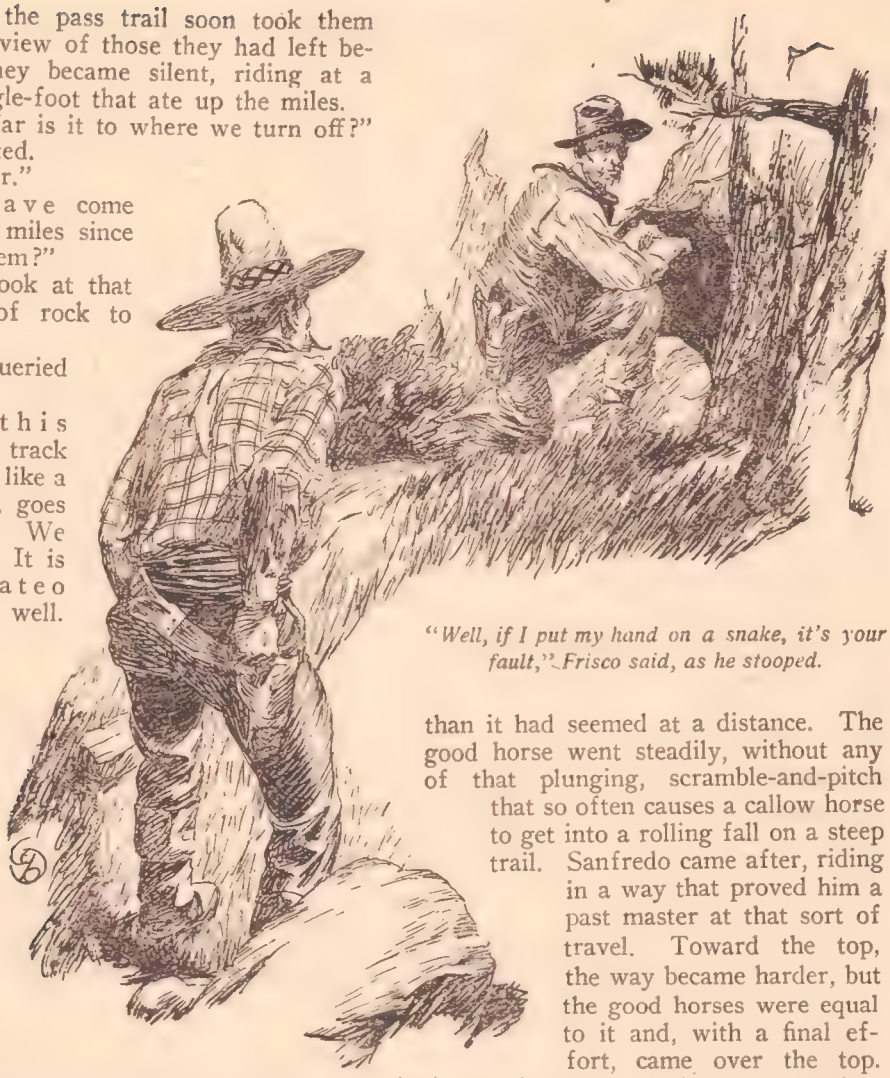
"Not far."

"We have come about ten miles since we left them?"

"*Si.* Look at that shoulder of rock to the left."

"*Si?*" queried Frisco.

"From this place a track that seems like a goat track, goes up to it. We take that. It is safe. Mateo knew it well.



*"Well, if I put my hand on a snake, it's your fault," Frisco said, as he stooped.*

That faint track crosses the side wall of the pass, and leads to the trail we are to take to the cache. You go first; my horse is tired and may stumble and roll, and your horse is more sure-footed."

"*Si.*" Seemingly indifferent to this excuse always to have him ride first, in perfect range for Sanfredo's bullets, Frisco obeyed.

"At the top of the faint trail, it will be your turn to be the guide. I know only where to turn off from the White Cliff Pass trail; beyond that I do not know the way."

"*Si;* let us mount, then, to the top of the cliff."

He turned his horse into the seeming goat path, that turned out to be better than it had seemed at a distance. The good horse went steadily, without any of that plunging, scramble-and-pitch that so often causes a callow horse to get into a rolling fall on a steep trail. Sanfredo came after, riding in a way that proved him a past master at that sort of travel. Toward the top, the way became harder, but the good horses were equal to it and, with a final effort, came over the top. And now the riders let them rest, as they stood on the rim of the pass wall and looked off toward the northeast, where a faint path wound away among the tumbled boulders of that upper level.

"We go that way," Frisco said at once. "It looks like a game track, but it is mentioned on the map as leading to another canyon."

"Yes, that must be it, but as to me, I do not know anything of the way, after reaching the top of the cliff wall."

Frisco led the way confidently, Sanfredo always carefully in the rear. Often he slyly fingered his gun; and as often, it seemed, Frisco turned his head, as if observing the flight of some bird high in the air or the scurrying of some small

animal of the rocky land all about them. The wind was keen up there; the long shadows fell ever more and more oblique. They found a slot in the earth that widened into the beginnings of a small canyon that in time led into a larger one, and then they had high walls on either hand. This canyon wound and turned upon itself like a labyrinth, yet Frisco seemed to have the clew to it. He told Sanfredo that he remembered the map, whose details were imprinted upon his mind firmly.

"Show me the map," Sanfredo urged slyly.

"Certainly; we are so close to the cache that it will not matter now," and he produced the pieced map.

"How did it become torn?"

"Mateo Trevino and Buchdell each had half."

"*Si.* Are we close to the place where the map tells of the crack in the wall of this canyon?" Sanfredo asked.

"There are the three boulders blocking this canyon almost completely, with only a small passage around them, on the left-hand side," answered Frisco. "There is the brown mass of stone in the canyon wall, near the top. Now let us line up across the top of the notched boulder, onto the brown mass of stone. See, that is like the sight of a rifle! Right under that darkest of the brown, as we see it through the notch in the big, topmost boulder, is the crack, according to the map."

"We leave the horses here?"

"*Si.* Come with me," said Frisco, swinging down and walking toward the base of the canyon wall under the brown mass of stone high above.

Here they came to what seemed like a curtain of rock. Fissures extended diagonally into the rock, like the chance fractures of an earthquake's making. Scanning these cracks, Frisco confidently entered one of them. Sanfredo would have drawn back, but Frisco called to him:

"Here is the tiny shelf mentioned on the margin of the map; and the half-smoked cigar, in the bottle, laid up on a shelf of rock."

Sanfredo entered the crack and found that it seemed to open out beyond. He examined the bottle and said:

"Mateo had one like that; lead into the passage, then."

Without hesitation, Frisco went on before. Sanfredo followed, his hand ever close to the butt of his gun. The way became gloomy, and the light all but failed them, then it became stronger and they emerged into a twilight that showed them the long, narrow sink hole ahead of them. It had stunted trees along the bottoms of the walls that hemmed it in, telling of springs or seepages among the shaled-off stones there, where a scanty layer of earth gave food for a limited growth of shrubs and ferns.

"Now where?" Sanfredo asked, watching Frisco's right hand closely. Frisco seemed careless, unafraid.

"The map will show." He produced it again, handing it to Sanfredo, who took it and inspected it closely.

At last Sanfredo turned and pointed up the narrow gash between the high and frowning walls: "Where those three larger trees are growing, that seems like the place. The base of the wall bulges out there, as if there had been formed a small cave under it."

"That is the place; keep the map, Sanfredo."

Sanfredo put the pieced papers into his pocket. Frisco and he went forward. Frisco stooped and picked up a bit of dried stick.

"There may be a snake holed up in such a place," he said. "I am going to stir up the hole and make sure no snake is in there before I reach in for the slicker."

"There will be no snake in such a place," Sanfredo said quickly, and now his hand jerked toward his gun.

"If you think not, I will not use the stick, then," said Frisco, quietly, and he threw it down and went forward steadily. Ten paces from the small but sturdy trees, Sanfredo stopped, leaning forward slightly from the hips, his eyes narrowed and glittering. Frisco went among the trees, to the base of the cliff wall, and paused. He looked up, down, to either side.

"There is a hole under the rocks here," he called back.

"*Si?*"

"I'll hand out the slicker, with what's in it, and you can take it, then, Sanfredo, till we get out into the other canyon. There we can look it over to see if it's all right, after being under these rocks for weeks."

"*Si.*" But Sanfredo did not advance. Somewhere up along the wall a canyon-

swift let down a thin, silvery thread of song into the deep silence. Scent of far-off flowers blooming somewhere among the upper fastnesses came on a vagrant breeze. The dust stirred up the canyon floor and came eddying down toward them.

"Well, if I put my hand on a snake, it's your fault," Frisco said, laughingly, as he stooped to reach into the hole.

Sanfredo stiffened, his hand swept to his belt, touched the butt of his gun, as Frisco's eyes, now, for the first time, seemed to be off him. Now Frisco was giving all his time to the effort of getting the cache from the hole under the base of the rocks. Among the trees his bent body seemed to merge for a moment with the base of the wall, then there came a sudden crashing sound in there and a cry of agony.

"Sanfredo!" he called.

Sanfredo straightened up, his gun out, and shouted scornfully:

"So, you are in the trap of the wolf? Mateo told me that he had set a trap there, over the cache, and that whoever touched it, without knowing of the secret, had not come to own the map honestly and was a traitor. I denounce you as a traitor and kill you as such!"

Sanfredo threw forward his gun.

Frisco writhed, fell aside, as if to at least spoil the aim of the other.

There was a rain of bullets in the gathering gloom. Smoke drifted, eddied, fell in the ensuing silence, spread out like winding cloth. Above, the last light of day turned the lips of the cliff to tints of glory. The canyon-swift swung past, on rapid wing, twittering in fright as it passed through the lazily lifting shrouds of heavy smoke.

A man staggered down the canyon floor, with the roll of a yellow, well-oiled slicker under his arm. He raced to the crack in the rocks, wormed his way through the crevices, found the horses waiting outside, and mounted that of Sanfredo. Leading the other, he spurred down the outer canyon without looking back.

Behind, in the secret canyon where the gun fight had taken place, all was still now. At the base of the wall, a man's figure kneeled, as if he were thrusting his hands under the rock base, into the hole, where had been the stolen cache of El Matador's band.

The darkness fell, complete and all-obliterating; the glory faded from the crown of the canyon above. The canyon-swift twittered no more. An owl called from some cleft in the upper rocks.

The man who had fled kept on down the outer canyon, steadily and purposefully, and as one who knows his destination and intends not to slacken until he has reached it.

The slicker, rolled tightly and well tied behind the cantle of his saddle, he turned to and patted from time to time.

Once he stopped, ejected used shells from his guns, and saw to it that they were in good condition. Then, as the darkness found him in that wider canyon, he kept on, without pause or slackening or turning aside.

To be concluded in the next issue of FAR WEST ILLUSTRATED

# Hunting Grounds for Rent

LUCKY is the Texas rancher who owns springs, bushes, cliffs, or other natural features, which attract wild life to his ranch, for he also attracts wealthy sportsmen, and can sell his hunting rights for a good round sum.

It is not uncommon, now, for sportsmen from the cities to rent from one thousand to ten thousand acres of land, during the hunting season. By paying from five to fifteen dollars a day, and another sum for a hunting license, the hunter is entitled to the exclusive use of the land for the time rented. He can take hunting parties over the land at any time during that period, and can shoot any lawful quarry that wanders into his territory.

This arrangement proves both convenient for the sportsman, and almost as profitable for the owners of land best adapted to hunting, as if they leased that land for live stock.

# Buckers and Buckaroos

## By Arthur Chapman

*How both buckers and buckaroos are trained for the arena.*

RIDE him, Tom! Stick to him, you cowboy!"

The cry of the crowd was familiar enough, and so was the scene. It was at a rodeo in a little town in Southern Utah—Cedar City, to be exact. There was a cloud of dust overhanging the arena, where the cowboys had been "doing their stuff," which consisted of daredevil rides on bucking horses and steers. But Tom, who was getting the loudest acclaim, was essaying the most daring feat of all. He was riding a buffalo—and riding him bareback!

Across the arena charged a bison, as wild as any of the millions of buffalo that used to roam the Western prairies. He ran with the peculiar, lumbering gait of his kind, lumbering but swift. His great head was close to the ground, and behind those high, humped shoulders, sat a Piute cowboy, Indian Tom. The cowboy was riding "straight up." By some feat of magic, he retained his seat on that sloping, powerful back. He was out to prove that a buffalo could be ridden; and he stayed on, until the animal had crossed the arena and the pickup men and hazers dashed out to keep the monarch of the plains from crashing through the fence.

It was a clean ride, and Indian Tom—an American if any one ever had a right to the title—had proved again that the American cowboy can ride just about anything on four legs.

Wild horses that have never known the touch of the saddle, and wild steers right from the open ranges, have challenged the skill of Western riders since the earliest days of the cattle game, long before there were any Wild West shows or rodeos. On the round-up, after a calf has been branded, it is not uncommon for a cowboy to jump astride the frightened animal, when the bawling "critter" dashes back toward the herd. Calf riding is not dangerous, but it is difficult, and, when a cowboy gets a spill, he joins in the laughter at his own expense. More daring is the cowboy who leaps on the back of a steer or cow after it has been branded, just to prove that he can stick on for a certain length of time.

These things have become habits through the years, and it is not strange that, when rodeos became popular, the public was curious to see the roughest of the rough-riding stunts that previously had been confined to private exhibitions at the round-up fire.

One of the most daring riding stunts ever pulled, took place some years ago at one of the earliest of the Wild West shows, given by the city of Denver, a pioneer in this field of entertainment. A Colorado cattle grower had a bull which many cowboys had tried in vain to ride. The bull was a genuine "pitcher," with as many fancy steps as a bucking horse. The reputation of the animal was spread far and wide, and finally he was brought to the Denver show, where the best riders of the West were gathered to compete for the championship. The owner of the bull put up five hundred dollars as a side bet, so confident was he that no cowboy could stay on the back of the animal.

Sam Scoville, a lanky cowboy from Colorado, one of the best bronchobusters the West has ever known, volunteered to ride

the bull. In a few minutes Sam raised sufficient backing to cover the cattleman's side bet. It was agreed that the bull was to be ridden bareback. The only aid afforded Sam was a surcingle around the bull's body, close to the shoulders.

Riding a bovine critter of any kind is doubly difficult from the fact that the skin of these animals is very loose. Also, the irregularities of the animal's body are such that the rider has a very poor seat. These matters did not deter Sam, who had ridden many a steer in cowboy play on the round-up.

"I'll go you one better, Mister," drawled Sam. "I'll agree to wear spurs and prod your bull a little, so he'll be sure to buck his best."

Sam was as good as his word. Not only did he stick on the bull's back, longer than the time agreed on, but he actually spurred the animal as he rode. The bull bucked and kicked to no avail. Sam rode the bellowing. frenzied animal to a finish. Scoville rode with the same easy grace which characterized his riding in the saddle, and his only comment, as he jumped to the ground, was:

"Bring on another bull!"

The steers that are used to test the skill of the daredevil riders from the cattle ranges are not to be trifled with. They are not "gentled" stock, like the horses which amble about the circus arena. They are the nearest approach to the longhorn Texas steer that can be found to-day. Owing to the constant improvement in Western range cattle in recent years, it has grown increasingly difficult to find steers of the rangy, longhorn type. The old steer on which the cattle business was founded was lean, and swift, and bad-tempered. He was all horns and hoofs, and it took a good cow pony to outrun him. This type of animal has been succeeded by the heavy, white-faced animal that assays many more beefsteaks to the critter, but is deficient in the matter of speed.

For the steer riding at the round-ups, a cross between the Mexican steer and the Indian Brahma is used. This animal is smaller than the average range steer, but it is fleet and bad-tempered. When a cowboy is turned loose on the back of one of these steers, with nothing but a surcingle to cling to, he has plenty of work cut out for him, if he is to keep from being spilled. Some steers will buck after the most approved styles set by bucking broncos. They will sunfish, change ends, and go through all the other gyrations that make a bucking horse hard to ride. Furthermore, they have a habit of kicking while they are in mid-air. There is nothing more lightninglike than the kick of an enraged steer. A cowboy who has been pitched off is lucky if he is not kicked before he hits the ground. And the Mexican-Brahmas have a bad habit of turning and goring a man who is down—which is one more inducement for the rider to stay on the animal's back if he can.

When a young cowboy has gained something more than a local reputation on the round-up, as a daring and skillful rider, he begins to long for other worlds to conquer. He has started in by riding the worst horses in the remuda or horse cavvy on the round-up—the saddle animals used by the cowboys. Many of these animals are only half broken, but, no matter how crudely his saddle horses have been gentled, every cowboy is supposed to be able to "ride his string." It is a matter of pride with him. But occasionally there will be a horse that is too much for the average cowboy to ride. That horse is turned over to the best "buster" in the outfit. After he has ridden all the bad horses with his outfit, the champion of the round-up tries his hand at riding an occasional steer at the branding fire.

Then he tries out his talents at some local rodeo, staged at the nearest town. If he makes good there, he enters the lists at Cheyenne or Pendleton, which is akin to a bush leaguer taking a try at big-league baseball. He begs or borrows enough to cover his entrance fees and his railroad fare to the rodeo town. Also he must have enough to pay for shipping his pet cow pony to the show. If he is lucky enough to land the championship, he may walk off with a thousand dollars in prize money and no end of loving cups, silver-mounted saddles, fancy sombreros, and gaudy shirts. If luck is not with him, the aspiring rider may have to telegraph the boys at the home ranch for funds to take him back to the old, familiar scenes. But with fair breaks, if the rider has the skill and training to carry him along, he may make more in two or three weeks at the

show game than he can make in an entire year punching cows.

If the young contestant has entered the steer-riding events, he finds that there are certain rules which must be lived up to. The bucking strap, or rope, which is placed about the steer's body, to afford a "hand holt," is sometimes called a "bull rigging." It is fastened in such a way that the rider can bring the strap or rope with him when he "takes off" the steer at the end of the ride. If he doesn't bring the bull rigging he doesn't get any money. Failure to bring the rope or strap indicates that he has merely jumped for safety.

When the steer rider "takes off," he not only has to pick a soft spot for landing, but he has to be ready to do some sprinting if the angry steer concludes to chase the cowboy who has been pestering him. There is no chance for the pickup men to come to a rider's assistance, as in the case of bronchobusting. Everybody stands clear when the steer riding is on, for the reason that a steer plays no favorites when "on the peck" or "on the prod." If the rider makes his get-away when the ride is finished, the steer looks around for some one else to gore. As a result, there is a wild scattering for cover among those in the arena, until a roper comes up and gets a lariat around the frenzied animal's horns.

There are even more rules governing the bucking-horse contests. The young fellow from the open ranges draws his mount by lot for each performance. No special makes of saddles are permitted, all using the same type. The rider has nothing to control his mount but a halter with two reins. He must hold the reins six inches above the horse's neck with which ever hand he elects to use. Holding the mane or saddle disqualifies the rider. If he changes hands on the reins, if he wraps them around his hand, or if he loses a stirrup, he is disqualified.

The bucking horses at the big shows are the worst of their type. T. Joe Cahill, who has been the presiding genius of the Cheyenne Frontier Days show, off and on, for many years, keeps an eagle eye out for buckers that will make life miserable for riders, as well as for riders that will let the buckers know they have been ridden. Scouting for baseball talent isn't done any more completely or efficiently than scouting for bucking horses.

But, in spite of the constant search that is going on for bucking horses, it is admittedly getting harder to find buckers of the right type. For this reason, a veritable training school for bucking bronchos is conducted. Let it be supposed that a good natural bucker has been picked up on the range. He is put through his bucking paces to see if he has real talent.

A horse of this type is afflicted with a disposition that makes him dangerous and useless on the cow range. He starts to buck at the most inopportune times, and as no cowboy wants him in his string, the destiny of such an animal is clearly that of a show horse. When the animal's training begins, he is put in a chute and saddled. The saddle is an old "cactus" variety and is put on in such a way that it can be pulled off the horse when desired. Just to add more pep to the bucking of the "student" horse, some old tin cans are tied to the saddle, and perhaps a cowbell or two.

The chute is opened and the outlaw prances forth, head down and emitting squeals with every buck. The tin pans and cowbells emit a fearful din, and the horse bucks higher and harder. At the right moment, there is a timely tug at the long rope leading to the saddle, and the old "cactus" slides off, with its cans and bell. Relieved of this hated encumbrance, the horse makes a few more bucks and then stops and looks around, as much as to say:

"Did you see me buck that thing off? I guess they can't put anything on my back that will stay very long. Some bucker I am—eh, what?"

This conceit in the horse is deliberately encouraged. The next day the same performance is gone through with, except that the rope is jerked sooner and the horse seems to think that his bucking efforts are getting better results. So, from day to day, the student bucks harder and harder as he comes from the chute, while the saddle comes off more quickly each day, so that the bucker will not become discouraged.

An intensive course of training like this is guaranteed to put the needed finish on the work of any natural bucker. Of course there are some outlaws that do not

need training of any sort. But such horses are getting rare, and it has been found that some careful coaching is necessary in most cases. Incidentally, there is no truth to statements that burs and cactus are put under saddles to make horses buck more violently. All rodeos nowadays are under supervision of humane societies. No rider is permitted to spur or "scratch" his mount unnecessarily or to abuse the animal in any way, and the odds are all with the horse against the bronchobuster. At some shows, the spurs must be covered with tape or leather.

What makes a bronc rider a champion? It is the same thing that makes a baseball player, or golfer, or tennis player, a champion. It is a coördination of various faculties, plus gameness. A rider may have all the natural skill in the world, but if he is not game to the core, he never will get in the money at any Western rodeo.

Every bucking horse has a style or technic of its own. Consequently a bronchobuster must be able to meet constantly differing conditions. Some horses will buck with a "walking-beam" motion; that is, they will leap from the hind feet and alight on the forefeet. This type is comparatively easy to ride. Other horses will "sunfish," that is, twist the body into a crescent, right and left alternately, while in the air. This is the most difficult type to ride, as the rider is likely to be caught off balance when the horse strikes the ground. Other horses will "fence corner," or "swap ends," meaning that they will turn constantly while bucking. Still others will buck in a straight line from the time they start, and perhaps will crash through a fence unless they are headed off.

No cowboy can explain his system of riding. In general it can be said that a successful bronchobuster must have a sense of balance like that of an aviator or a juggler. In fact, some of the most successful aviators in the World War were recruited from the ranks of the cowboys. Like the successful journalist, who has been described as one who must know "where hell is going to break out next," the bronc rider must know just where his horse is going to alight at the finish of every jump. If a twist in mid-air has thrown the rider a trifle off balance, the shock of the horse's impact against the earth will do the rest of the trick, and the rider will either pull leather or be thrown ignominiously in the dust.

The life of a bronchobuster, so far as his work in the saddle is concerned, is shorter than that of the average prize fighter or baseball player. There is no harder and more telling physical work in the world. It is not infrequent for a bronchobuster to be bleeding at the mouth or even at the ears, after a hard ride. Men have been known to die in the saddle, riding "straight up." On the cattle and horse ranches of the West, the horse breaker was never given any other work to do. He might loaf most of the day, but an hour or two of gentling wild horses was recognized as more than equal to the ordinary day's work.

Injuries put most of the bronchobusters out of the running. Some horses are of the man-killer type. They will strike out with their forefeet when they are being saddled, or they will fling themselves backward in an attempt to crush their rider. In such a case, a bronchobuster is lucky if he twists himself out of the way so that he escapes being pinned down by the horn of the saddle. Or a horse may fall sidewise and crush a rider's leg. As a general rule, however, it is the hard pounding that finishes the career of the bronchobuster. He takes more punishment, in a few minutes on the back of an outlaw horse, than a prize fighter receives in a long contest. The outlaw horse observes no rules. He is out to win, and to administer all the punishment possible.

One of the most daredevil stunts ever tried by any rider was performed by Billy Bacon, a cowboy whose exploits will be talked of in Wyoming for many years to come. Bacon was a bronchobuster who gentled wild horses for one of the big Wyoming outfits. He boasted that there never was a horse so wild that Billy Bacon could not ride him, and he made good his boast. One day, when he was breaking a wild horse, Bacon bet that he could jump the animal between a lead and trail wagon that were being drawn across the plains by a team of eighteen oxen. He drove his horse between the wagons as they were on the move. The horse made the jump but fell and broke Bacon's leg, permanently crippling him. Bacon's career was permanently ended some years later at

Fort Fetterman when he got in a fight with another man at a dance hall. Both drew and fired at the same instant and both fell dead.

One of the greatest rides ever made was when Harry Brennan, one-time champion of the world, rode a man-killing horse known as Pin Ears. The horse was from Northwestern Colorado and had the reputation of being untamable. Not only was Pin Ears a vicious bucker, knowing most of the wiles of the sunfisher, but he seemed to be possessed of a mad desire to kill anybody who was daring enough to attempt to ride him. If Pin Ears could not dislodge a rider by ordinary tricks, he would fling himself backward. He had pinned two cowboys beneath the saddle horn, with fatal results. The horse was not the ordinary bronc type, but had a strain of thoroughbred blood.

Pin Ears was brought to Denver, and Harry Brennan essayed to ride him. Brennan was a cool, daring, and resourceful rider—one of the most graceful men that ever got into a saddle. Pin Ears was blindfolded and saddled, after putting up stubborn resistance. The outlaw struck out furiously at the wranglers who were helping in the saddling process, and nearly added one or two more victims to his score. When all was ready, Brennan slipped into the saddle, and the blindfold was taken from the horse's eyes.

Then began a battle between man and horse which those who were privileged to witness it will never forget. Pin Ears bucked and squealed. He arched his neck and tried vainly to bite his rider's feet. But Brennan sat in the saddle with his accustomed grace. No "daylight" showed between horse and rider, nor did Brennan once "pull leather" or "grab the biscuit," as the saddle horn is called. Having exhausted all ordinary tricks, Pin Ears at last tried a man-killing stunt. He reared and pawed the air with his forefeet momentarily, and then flung himself backward. The spectators thought that Brennan was crushed beneath the horse, but the rider signaled the pickup men to keep back. Pin Ears was on his side, with Brennan's leg underneath. Brennan, as cool as ice in the emergency, maintained an upward pull on the rein, keeping the horse's head high from the ground. With the other hand, the rider pulled downward on the saddle horn. This meant that Pin Ears could not struggle to his feet, nor could he roll over. Finally, at the psychological moment, when Pin Ears had broken into a profuse sweat, Brennan released the pressure on the rein. The horse struggled to his feet, and the spectators burst into a cheer when it was seen that Brennan was in the saddle.

There was no more fight left in Pin Ears. A few half-hearted bucks were made, and then Brennan leaped from the back of the beaten man-killer.

For the sake of expediting rough-riding performances, the saddling, nowadays, is generally done in chutes. After the saddle has been adjusted, the rider takes his position, and the chute door is opened. The horse dashes into the arena and does his stuff, according to his talents or training as a bucker. There is some criticism of this method of saddling, but as a matter of fact it works against the rider rather than the horse. When a bucking horse is saddled in the open, there is often a prolonged fight. The horse will rear, and plunge, and fight, until sometimes it lies down through sheer exhaustion. It is not unusual to see a horse, with saddle half on, plunging about the arena with two cowboys clinging to its neck. This means that, by the time the rider is in the saddle, the horse has used up a good deal of its energy. There is no opportunity for such preliminary fighting when the saddling is done in a chute. All the strength of the horse is in reserve for the bucking.

The rider who has been out of luck in the bucking contests at a rodeo may recoup his fortune in the wild-horse race. Wild-horse races are popular features of all the big Western rodeos to-day, and they are the most thrilling and colorful of the events.

The wild horses are not such in name only. They are actually ownerless horses that are found in great numbers in many Western States. Nevada and Utah have been haunts of the wild horse ever since the days of the Spanish explorers in the Southwest. Wild-horse bands are found in Arizona and New Mexico, and in Eastern Oregon and Montana.

The wild horses are generally small but active and fiery animals. They go under such names as "broomies" or "broomtails,"

"fuzztails," and "tackies." They have never been saddled and probably never will be, as a majority of them are not of any value for domestic purposes. After a wild horse has run the range for three or four years, he will always continue to have a hankering for the free life he has led, and, even if captured and broken, will decamp at the first opportunity.

In the wild-horse race, fifteen or twenty, sometimes more of these wild horses are brought into the arena at one time. "Brought" is hardly the word, as they are dragged, and pushed, and all but carried, fighting every inch of the way. Then the cowboy, who is allowed one helper, is supposed to ride his mount around the track. At some contests, saddles are used, and the race starts when the saddling begins. Most of the wild-horse events, however, are "slick"—that is, the horses are ridden bareback.

The start of a wild-horse race, with the track in front of the grand stand filled with plunging, fighting animals, and dodging cowboys, is just one thrill after another. When the riders are mounted and the race actually begins, there are more thrills. The wild horses, never having been broken, do not know what it is all about. They dart in all directions, some of them even crashing through fences. Cowboys are knocked down, kicked, and stepped on. There is the liveliest sort of dodging to keep out of danger.

After a cowboy is once mounted on a wild horse, and has urged his mount part of the way around the track, the animal may turn around and run the other way. Or it may hurdle the low fence separating the track from the arena, or crash through the bar, and dash across the inclosure.

Occasionally a wild horse proves to be a good natural bucker. In that case, the cowboy is likely to be pitched off, if he happens to be riding bareback. Some of them buck so strenuously that they unseat good riders in spite of the advantages of saddle and stirrups. To be pitched from a wild horse's back, with other wild horses milling about in the immediate vicinity is no joke. Many riders who have come unscathed through the regular bucking contest, or who have survived the steer riding without injury, have had to be taken to the hospital tent on account of injuries received in wild-horse races.

This form of racing is such a game of chance, however, that the cowboys take to it as a sort of gamble. It is not uncommon for a rider to be within a few feet of victory, only to have the opportunity of getting the prize money lost to him forever, through the perverseness of his mount. He may have urged his horse within a hundred feet of the finish line, with the nearest contestant not half way around the track. Then suddenly his horse may turn and run all the way around the track in the opposite direction. Some cowboy who was late in getting away at the start may be the one to make a successful finish. Nobody can prophesy who will be the victor in a wild-horse race, as the skill of a rider counts for little. But it takes a bulldog sort of courage to face the dangers of such a race.

The cowboy on the open range is always practicing trick stunts on his horse. He will ride at full speed and pick up a handkerchief, and leap off and on his horse with the utmost abandon. Trick riding has been done under such circumstances for many years, but with no great audiences to cheer the daring riders. Even when the first rodeos were put on, after the success of the Buffalo Bill exhibitions, the public was so interested in bronchobusting that no attention was paid to the "stunt" possibilities of the cowboy contingent.

Of late years, however, a school of fancy riders has been developed. These fancy riders, who have graduated from the ranks of the cowboy and the cowgirl, will ride at full tilt, swinging beneath the body of the galloping horse. They will leap from the saddle when the horse is going at a rapid pace, and, swinging by the pommel, will vault over the horse's back in a series of graceful jumps, from one side to the other. Or they will ride head down on the back of a running horse, clinging by one knee across the saddle.

The trick riders take great risks in their work. Unlike circus performers, they have no soft earth to break their fall, in case they miscalculate or in case the horse stumbles. As in the case of "Red" Sublette, the famous cowboy clown, their work is apparently much easier than that of the bronchobusters and steer riders, but, in reality, it is more dangerous and difficult.

Relay racing is another outgrowth of cowboy sport. The relay race is a survival from the day of the pony express. Cow outfits in earlier days used to get up teams of relay racers to compete with each other. To-day, no cowboy spectacle is complete without its relay race. Each entry is made up of three horses and a rider. The cowboy circles the track, once on his first mount. Then, at the home stretch, he leaps from his horse, takes off the saddle, and throws it on another horse which is held in readiness. The horses are so trained that as soon as the saddle is flung on and girthed, they start off at top speed. The cowboy runs alongside, leaps into the saddle, and is off around the track again. This is repeated at the beginning of the final heat.

When several relay riders, with evenly matched strings are competing, the excitement is intense, as the cowboys dash up to the remount stations and change saddles and dash away again. The dismounting is done, almost at full speed, and the changing of saddles consumes but a few seconds. A special relay saddle has been designed, with the horn much higher than that of the ordinary stock saddle. This enables the cowboy to make a more certain grab as he swings himself into the saddle. Also, a special cinch has been developed for relay racing. A semirigid girth swings under the horse's belly when the saddle is thrown on; thus the rider is enabled to grasp the girth quickly and hook it while on the run. A series of rings, attached to a heavy strap, makes it possible to hook the saddle to a horse of any size.

Relay horses are specially trained for this work. They are not chosen from cow pony stock, but are blooded animals, capable of a great burst of speed. Relay riding calls for uncanny quickness on the part of the rider in getting on and off his mounts and changing saddles. Just as in the days of the pony express, the relay riders are chosen for their lightness. Their work often leads to serious injuries, particularly in dismounting and mounting, literally "on the run." Sometimes a saddle is not properly cinched under such circumstances, and the cowboy gets a bad spill before he has gone a dozen yards from the post, and, as likely as not, he is run over by the horse of a competitor.

The cowboy, not to be outdone in any form of riding, has, of late years, taken up the Roman standing race. This form of racing is popular among the crack riders of the cavalry, but some of the cowboys have proved themselves able to compete with the best Roman standing riders in the army. Again, unlike the Roman standing racers in the circus, the contestants at the rodeo have no soft earth or sawdust to fall into in case of a spill. Roman riding calls for an uncanny sense of balance, and, most of all, it depends on the ability of the rider to keep his horses close together. If the animals "spread," a fall is sure to be the result.

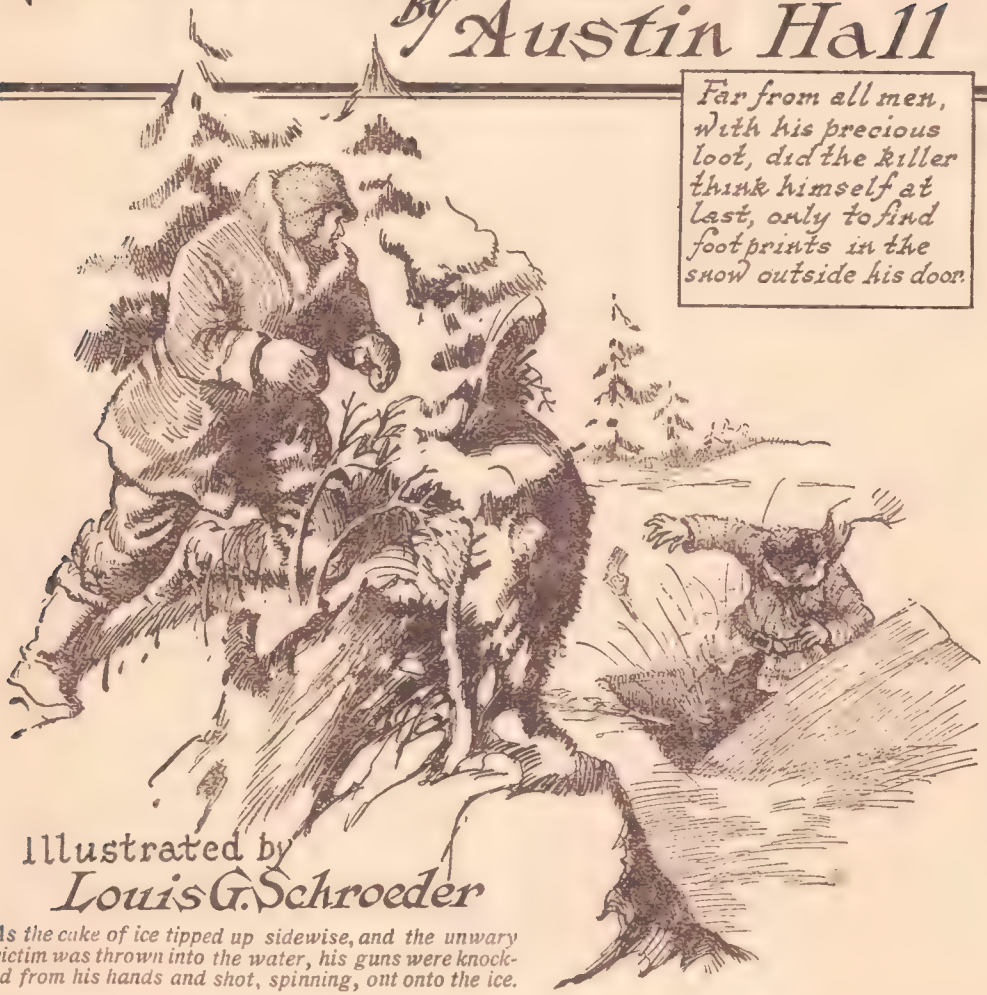
"Where do the good riders come from?" is a question that is often asked. Almost anywhere, west of the Missouri River, judging from the entries that pour in upon the rodeo committees at Cheyenne and Pendleton every year. Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, Idaho, Texas, and Oklahoma send in large delegations. Probably Oklahoma furnishes more contestants than any other State. But there is no geographical location that seems to "have the call" on the rough-riding talent. Oregon, Utah, and Nevada all send their contestants to the big shows. When a boy from the cattle ranges makes good on the rodeo circuit, he is pretty apt to follow the game in spite of all its dangers. Very few manage to escape without serious injury sooner or later; but the characteristic gameness of the American cowboy is always in evidence. If he is able to limp into the arena and climb into the saddle, a cowboy will take part in a contest. Nothing short of complete disablement will keep him off the back of a horse.

Are the riders of to-day as good as those of a generation ago? The answer, so far as those in charge of rodeos are concerned, is yes. I have talked with old cattlemen who take pleasure in acting as judges at rough-riding contests, and have asked them to make comparisons. The opinion seems to be that, while there were a greater number of good riders in the past than there are to-day—which was natural when the cattle business was in its heyday—those who are now upholding the traditions of American saddlemen are "top hands," and would have been considered as such in any company. In fact, they can ride almost anything on four legs.

# Silver Bait

## By Austin Hall

*Far from all men, with his precious loot, did the killer think himself at last, only to find foot prints in the snow outside his door.*



Illustrated by Louis G. Schroeder

*As the cake of ice tipped up sidewise, and the unwary victim was thrown into the water, his guns were knocked from his hands and shot, spinning, out onto the ice.*

FROM the seclusion of a bunch of birch brush, "Big" Hutton watched the man at the bottom of the canyon, and saw him sneaking along the river bank and climbing over the bald slides that led down to the icy sheet of the stream. As he waited, Big Hutton chuckled in his half-grown beard; for, barring accidents and the loss of his thinking faculties, he had conceived a way of reaping a fortune. All he had to do, was to wait until the time and the moment when his victim should be in the proper place; there would be no evidence, not a thing that could incriminate the man who had done the killing.

Killing? Big Hutton hardly liked the word. It made him shudder. He was not that sort of a man. He did not believe in it, because, well it seemed to lead to the gallows. No! He had concocted a better plan, one that would culminate in an accident and persuade even the most painstaking investigator that the whole thing had been merely the matter of a trapper's ill luck.

Big Hutton laughed again. He prided himself that there was no one who could match him in a game of villainy, and when it came to cunning, he was possessed of the subtlety of a fox. Also, a fox had a great deal to do with his being on the summit of the ridge at that very moment. The snow was coming in flurries, as he

watched the man walking along with the string of traps, entirely oblivious of the terrible fate that awaited him. Big Hutton looked up at the darkened sky, buttoned his jacket tight up against his neck, and thanked the beneficent Providence that had sent the snow to cover up his tracks.

Three months before, he had come into the country, leaving a far State and a bad record, to hole up in the territory behind Blue Mountain. Ostensibly, his purpose had been trapping; but his real intent had been to get into a fresh land where the pickings would be rich and easy. Once there, he had thrown out a small trap line, worked a little, and spent the remaining time roaming over the hills, to locate any easy and profitable victim that might be thrown in his way. He had not been particular, and consequently he had counted himself doubly fortunate when, without a bit of warning, he had found himself staring at the opportunity of picking up several thousand dollars.

That had come, one day, when he had climbed over the Skamootch Ridge to a little flat where a freshly built cabin was giving forth smoke and the odors of frying bacon. Pegged along the walls outside, were furs without number—some of them cased and some not; and, looking out of the door was the strong face of Tom Stone, the trapper. In ten minutes, Big Hutton had made a woodsman's acquaintance and was sitting down to supper. A half hour later, he was listening to the news that set his blood to tingling with covetousness; also he was sizing up and taking stock of the man before him.

Tom Stone was not a trapper of the old school; he was not old in any way; in fact he was young, alert, six foot two, and one whom even Big Hutton would not have dared tackle in an open fight. Also, he had a clean-cut eye, steel gray, that seemed to look straight into the big man's soul. The man would be fearless, but he might lack caution; such men usually do. And Big Hutton felt doubly sure of it when, without a bit of reserve, Tom had reached behind a box and tossed out two of the grandest furs that Hutton or any other man had ever looked at.

Silver foxes! Each one of them was worth well into the thousands! Tom Stone's words had rung in his ears.

"Ain't they beauties?" the young man had asked. "Say, there's a fortune right there. Those fellows have been up here back of Blue Mountain for years. Trappers have seen 'em but didn't get 'em. I guess I had all the luck. You see, I've been after this pair for three years. Last season I did pretty well, and the season before that; but this is the first year in my life that I ever made a clean-up. Foxes are good this year. I got some marten, and there's plenty of otter."

Big Hutton had listened, like one in a dream. Right in front of his eyes was the very thing he was after. But how to go about it was the problem. One look at the young man had told plainly that he was one to fight and leave almost any assailant on the floor. A gun? No, for that would mean a killing, with the gallows staring him in the face. His hand had gone over the white-tipped fur, stealthily, like that of a man stroking a cat. Most of all he could not understand the other's frankness. The furs lay upon the table to be taken or left alone; surely a man with such fearlessness must have something up his sleeve.

That was the thing that got Big Hutton. For hours, that night, he had lain in his bunk, thinking. He could hear the other's deep, even respiration; but at each movement or stir on his part, it would stop. A man who slept like a cat! Once, when the big man turned over, Tom Stone was out on the floor, tiptoe, with a match in his hand. The sight of the finely muscled body caused Hutton to alter several plans; but he had not a single doubt of his ability to get hold of the furs eventually. However, he must not steal them, for that would bring the young man in pursuit of him; and he must not kill—at least not in the ordinary acceptance of the term.

As a result, Big Hutton was on the ridge, that particular afternoon when Tom Stone had headed up the icy bed of the Big Blue, setting traps and looking over the prospects for others. Big Hutton was gratified, because, after six weeks of scheming and sneaking through the forest, he had at last hit upon a way of getting his man without incriminating himself. Tom Stone was after otter. Fine! And when he trapped for otter, he would plant the sets through the ice in such a

manner that the furbearing amphibians would fall easy victims. For half an hour he had seen him driving stakes above the falls, close by a deep pool that would be a favorite haunt for the animals. In a flash, the thing had come to Big Hutton. It would all be so easy! So easy, in fact, that he could not help laughing.

Tom Stone continued on up the canyon. When he was out of sight, the big man slipped from his hiding place and descended to the river. Once there, he found the traps and the pen that the other had constructed. The set was above a sharp bend, where the water shot under the ice to drop over a convex ledge to the graveled bed, forty feet below. Being a miner of sorts, and knowing something of formations, the man knew the reason for the pool above the falls, namely, that a sharp rim rock lay along the brink and held back the stream like the sides to a cup. The water above was still and blue, proving its depth. Hutton had been in the place many times, but this was the first time that he had ever thought of making use of it. Standing near the brink, he gazed over the horseshoe falls, going first to one side of the ice and then to the other. Finally he returned to the trap-set and finished his calculation.

"Easiest thing I ever saw," he chuckled. "Just what I was waiting for. And it's a good thing I held on. You can't fool Big Hutton. There won't be a chance in the world of his gettin' away. Best of all, no one will ever know; and it wouldn't do 'em any good, if they did. I'll just fool that bird a-plenty, then, I can go over and pick up the furs, take some of my own along for a blind, and hit for the outside. I ought to get five thousand dollars. Huh! That will help some. Big Hutton, you sure did a wise thing when you came to Blue Mountain."

The powdery snow was still falling, coating the ice and dimming the heights with a fine white veil. Sneak thief that he was, Big Hutton thanked the snow; it would hide his tracks and give him time to return to his cabin to procure the articles necessary to the scheme at hand. Nor did he delay. In two hours he had reached his own camp, selected a saw, and made ready for leaving the mountains. That done, he lay down in his bunk for a long sleep.

Shortly past midnight, he awoke, strapped on his pack, and hurried out into the snow. When he saw that a light snow was still descending, he chuckled; somehow, each move he had made had been aided and abetted by the turn of circumstance.

"I'm sure in luck," he mumbled as he trudged along. "Tom Stone will be down the first thing in the morning; and when he comes, he'll be ready to dig up them otter. I'll tell the world he will. Yeh!"

It was still dark when he reached the bottom of the canyon which followed the stream toward the falls; but the light from the snow blanket enabled him to pick out the location of the trap-set. In a minute, he had his pack off and was at work with his saw. First he drove in a small hole; that done, he began cutting out a large square, close by the trap. When the ice cake was loose, he tested it with his foot, and had the satisfaction of watching it tip over on end.

"That'll fix it!" he exclaimed gleefully. "And he won't need a bit of help from me. Just to make sure, though, I'm goin' to cut out another one on the other side. Talk about your trappers—they ain't got nothin' on Big Hutton. You bet your life! There's more than one way to catch silver foxes. Now, all I'll have to do, will be to sneak over to the bank and wait. I could beat it off, but my friend might need a bit of watching. Besides, it's pretty cold, and I may have to saw out that block again."

When all was finished, he climbed to a near-by place of safety and hid himself in a clump of scrub cedar. Daylight was at hand, and it was almost time for Tom Stone to appear; for, unlike some trappers, he was inclined to visit his trap line at least once a day. Big Hutton understood the breed well enough to appreciate the fact that he would be anxious to look at the new set. Nevertheless, the minutes dragged on like hours, until shortly after dawn the figure of the young man appeared on the hillside.

Like a cat awaiting its prey, the big man watched him coming down to the icy bed of the stream. In two minutes, he had reached the pool above the cataract, thrown off his pack, and was approaching the trap-set. Big Hutton saw him pull out his .45 and pick up his .22 rifle. Why the

man had drawn his larger gun, Hutton did not know, but the sight of the thing sent a chill through his marrow. He hadn't thought of that part of the adventure.

Tom Stone was far out on the ice. Suddenly, he stopped, and, as if puzzled, looked down. Big Hutton heard him mutter.

"Huh! Tracks. Some one's been here, lookin' into my new set. Wonder who it could be, poking around this time in the morning. Sure looks funny."

Big Hutton was twitching with eagerness and fear; the falls were sending up the roar of tumbling waters, but for all that, he could almost hear his own heart beating. He had thought it was the surest bet in the world; but now that it had come to a show-down, he was not so sure. Would Tom Stone suspect? Would he he turn back?

A cry was his answer. Out on the bed of the stream, the young man had stepped forward, the cake of ice had tipped up sidewise, and the unwary victim was thrown into the water. More than that, his guns had been knocked from his hands and were shot, spinning, out onto the ice.

With a whoop of delight, Big Hutton leaped from the brush. In ten seconds he was at the edge of the break—just in time to see the other's head come popping up. A hand reached out and clutched the ice rim; behind it came the startled face of Tom Stone. There was entreaty in his eyes, and a sort of wonder; but no fear.

"You!" he exclaimed. "Big Hutton! Help me up. For Heaven's sake, help me! Give me a hand!"

But he stopped when he saw the big man was laughing; his expression became one of contempt, then of deep thought. He was listening to the fiendish pronouncement of the brute above him.

"Yeh," the big man called triumphantly. "I got you, didn't I? You bet! Thought I was a dumb-bell, hey? How about those silver foxes! Did you suppose I would pass up a chance like that? Huh, I'm a wise hombre. You're looking at Big Hutton now, bubby. Big Hutton! Ever hear of him? Well, I'll tell you, now that I've got you where you can't blab. He's the wisest baby that ever hit the West. He's fooled 'em in Montana, Wyoming, and everywhere else. There's a lot of sheriffs would like to get hold of him, but they can't. Savvy? I'm jest tellin' you this, because I like to confess—where it don't hurt. I'm about the foxiest old boy in the world. How does it feel in the water? Gettin' cold? Well, you can just keep hanging there until I get through talkin'. Savvy? You see, I had this all figured out. When the sheriff finds Tom Stone's missing, he'll think he was drowned, and I'll have the furs. You can bet they don't hang nothin' on Big Hutton! I guess, kid, you're out of luck. Well, I've got to be goin'. So long!"

Tom Stone was looking up, in a last desperate effort to solve his terrible problem; his lips muttered as he waited. Suddenly Big Hutton's foot shot out at the young man's head. Tom thrust up his hand, in an impulsive attempt to clutch the boot; the fingers of the other hand slipped from the ice. But Big Hutton was too fast; and down went the trapper's head. Foot poised, the brute waited, watching the bubbles, and listening. But the man did not come up. There was not a sign of him—only the half-balanced ice cake and the water below it. Five minutes, Big Hutton waited; then he turned away.

"Well, that's done," he said. "Wasn't hard, either. Now all I've got to do is to take my time and go it easy."

The snow had begun falling in a thick, obscuring curtain; so thick, in fact, that, although he was standing close to the brink, Big Hutton could scarcely discern the falls. He stepped to one side of the horseshoe cataract; then to the other. Not a soul was in sight; and he had nothing between himself and the furs.

Only one thing bothered him, and that was the thought of murder! The realization came to him with a rush; the very falls, sweeping over the precipice, seemed to shout the word. Not that he regretted the killing; but he dreaded the consequences. A man might be watching or waiting, or perhaps, there was something that he had overlooked. He endeavored to laugh his fears away, but the uneasiness persisted. For fully five minutes, he stood stockstill, expecting—he knew not what. Then reason returned and he almost shook off these frightful fancies.

"Shucks," he muttered, half to himself and half to the falls. "What am I scared of? I didn't kill him. He just drowned, that's all. And, besides, who would be lookin' on, in this here storm? Big Hut-

ton, you'd better be gettin' next to yourself."

But the fear persisted; and, halfway up the mountain, he turned in his tracks and looked back. A man who had seen a ghost could not have been more startled; he would have sworn that he heard something—a call that was screechy, weird, and, for all that, strangely like a human voice. It came out of the silence of the snow blanket, clean-cut and piercing. But once given, the sound was not repeated. The heavy silence hung like a pall; no sound could he hear but the labored beating of his heart. What could that frightful cry have been? For a moment his imagination ran riot; then, with a grunt of disgust he pivoted about and walked slowly on, talking scornfully all the while of his fool notions and superstitions. Just the same, he clutched his .45 tightly. The words came out on his frosty breath:

"Hutton, you're batty. What you need is some hot coffee. Yeh. That'll make you see things as they are. There ain't nothin' like good hot coffee. And there ain't no such things as ghosts. No, sir, there ain't," he repeated firmly.

But he was thankful when, at last, he staggered out of the storm into Tom Stone's cabin. The door sagged open at his touch, revealing the trim interior and the plentiful stock of provisions arranged along the walls, everything, even the folded towel, testifying to the methodical nature of the man he had ambushed. In two minutes he had a fire going and a pot of fragrant coffee on its way to a boil; in twenty more, he had cooked himself a meal, and was feeling something like his old self. And the furs! They were right where he had seen Tom Stone place them on the night of his visit; once again he had the opportunity of running his fingers over the precious pelts; only this time it was with the added exultation of ownership.

"Talk about luck," he gloated musingly. "There ain't nothin' like it. Yep. I came to Blue Mountain lookin' for somethin' good. Well, I got it."

But the sight of his loot gave him another thought; all that money should not repose in a pair of pelts. He would hurry to the railroad, he decided, hunt up the trader, and sell them. Then he could visit the city and have a real spree; and after that—well, out in the wilderness, Big Hutton would always be able to pick up a new victim. But for all of his villainy, Big Hutton was canny; he took nothing in the cabin outside of the furs, even neglecting some paper money that he found under the mattress.

"I might take it," he told himself, "but they'll be investigating mighty close. I hear the sheriff of this county is a mighty wise old coot. Well, he'll have to be all that and better, to prove anythin' on Big Hutton; because they'll find everything here—even his money. And that will throw 'em off the track entirely. They'll find his things just as they were when he cooked his last meal. They can't prove the murder——" He checked himself abruptly.

There it was again! And with it, the premonition of the gallows, the one thing that he was afraid of. It had popped out of his subconscious mind like an obsession. Murder! No, it wasn't that, it was —— And with that, his mind went back over the same old track. The quietness of the place got on his nerves, the clothes on the walls, the traps, everything made him apprehensive. His thoughts drifted back to that call in the woods.

"Hang it all," he muttered, "the sooner I get out of here, the quicker these notions will leave my head. She's sure spooky, but the foxes were worth it. Yeah. Guess I might as well start right now."

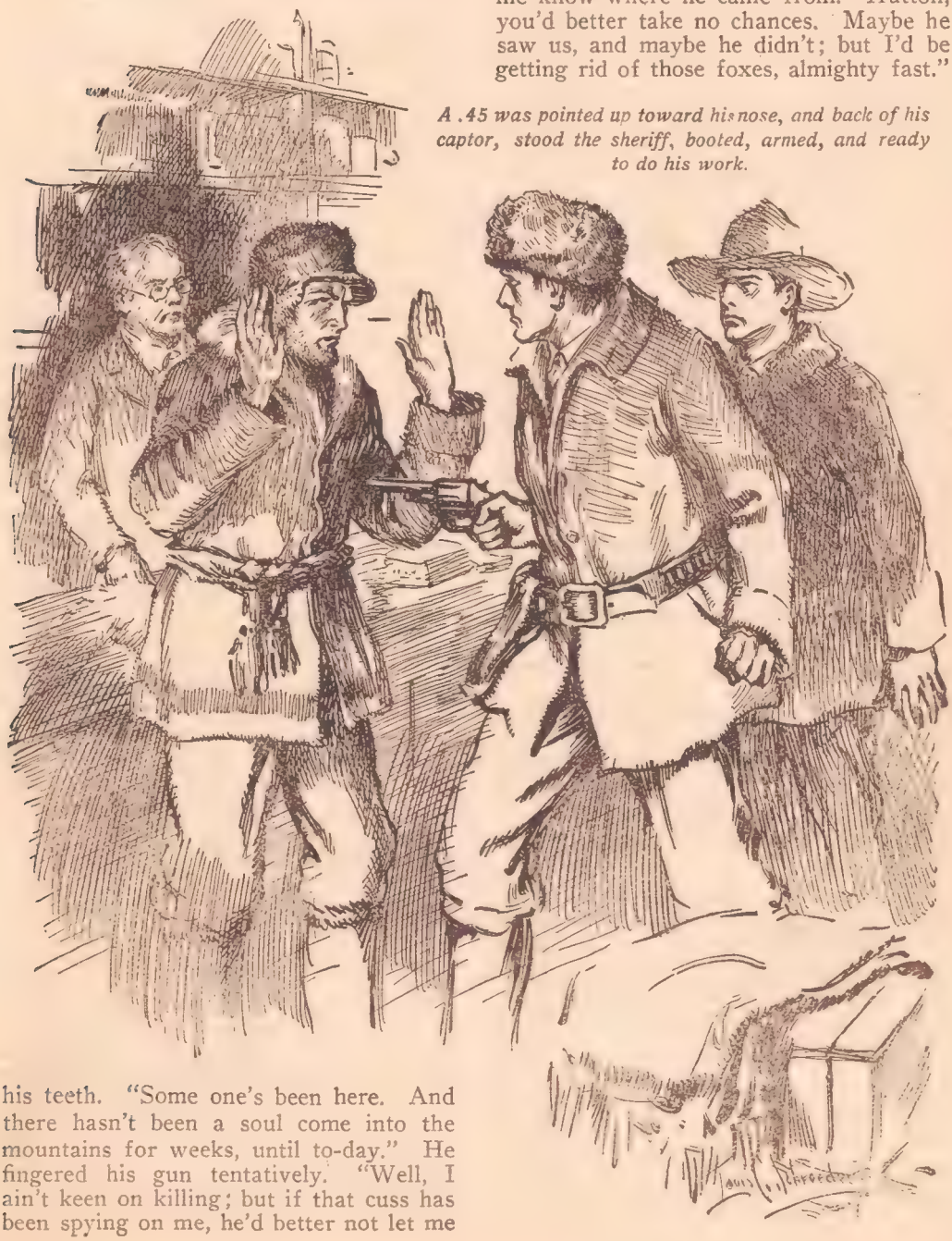
But it was a long way to the railroad, and there was much that could happen before he reached it. Big Hutton left Tom Stone's cabin just as he had found it, everything in its place, and with the added tone of the breakfast dishes on the table. With the pack on his back, and the furs inside it, he steadied himself against the storm, hitting along the ridges, and following the open spaces that led south.

In three hours, he had come to his own cabin, where, scenting the good that would come from another cup of coffee, he decided to lay up for a rest. But just as he approached, he received a very real shock. The door of the cabin was open—he had left it well latched—and outside in the snow were tracks.

Tracks! Not a doubt of it. The snow had drifted through and over them, half covering, but plainly revealing them, nevertheless. Big Hutton was too much of a trapper not to understand their signifi-

cance; he stooped down to examine them, noting their length and direction. Some were coming toward the house; others were leaving it. The first thought that entered his head was of the sheriff; the shadow of the law was always creeping close.

"Just my luck," he muttered between his teeth. "Some one's been here. And there hasn't been a soul come into the mountains for weeks, until to-day." He fingered his gun tentatively. "Well, I ain't keen on killing; but if that cuss has been spying on me, he'd better not let me spot him. Huh! It's always the way. Just when a fellow makes a clean-up, some double-crossin' deputy has to be snoopin' around. But let's see. He's come and gone. These tracks here say he left an hour ago; but they don't tell where. Oh, yes. South! That's the railroad. And town! And the others are too dim to let me know where he came from. Hutton, you'd better take no chances. Maybe he saw us, and maybe he didn't; but I'd be getting rid of those foxes, almighty fast."



*A .45 was pointed up toward his nose, and back of his captor, stood the sheriff, booted, armed, and ready to do his work.*

But for all that, he was a man of the wilderness and the snows; and he realized the value of hot food inside his stomach. He knew that if it came to a show-down, and there should be a race, the man with the food inside his stomach would win every time. So once more he cooked a warm meal and prepared for the final run to the railroad. However, just before he started, a scrap of paper caught his attention; it lay on the floor close by the door, and, from the way it had been torn in the corner part, it must have blown off a nail. He picked it up and read:

DEAR HUTTON: I'm a friend what dropped in to see you, but you warn't here. How's trappin'? Hear she's purty good. Thought I'd see you on the way thru; but guess I'll have to wait till you reach the railroad. Thought I'd surprise you, cause I'm a friend you'll never forget.

Yours truly,

A FRIEND.

If ever a man was frozen with fear, it was Big Hutton at that moment; he stood like one condemned, stone cold, motionless; then his face twisted with fury.

"A friend, eh?" he exclaimed, savagely. "I ain't go no friends, and I don't want any. And he ain't a friend at all. Just some sneakin' deputy what's aiming to string me up. That's what he is. But he ain't a-goin' to do it, now, nor never, because he aint' got nothin' on me. There ain't a soul what saw me. No, sir, there wasn't. I looked all around, I did. And there wasn't a living thing in sight. It's just some crooked officer what's come into my cabin and helped himself to what don't belong to him. But I've got a gun and a rifle; and I've got legs. Those tracks ain't covered yet, and there's lots of daylight. I ain't followed the woods all these years for nothin'. This time I'll kill, and kill quick!"

But his rage did not make him forget his natural woodcraft; out in the snow he brought into play every instinct that he was possessed of, running low, following the dim prints that lay in the snow, mile after mile, until it seemed incredible that a man could keep up such a terrible pace. But at each mile the prints grew plainer; and, better than that, the soft flurry of falling snow died down, and a clear sky broke overhead. Along the crest of a great ridge, the two men were hurrying straight south, the one walking at a fairly quick pace, and the other rushing ahead with the speed of one whose sole existence lay in the outcome.

Just at sundown, Big Hutton caught up. The man in front of him had arrived at flat tableland and was taking a trail that lay along the western edge. In an instant, the big fellow had formed his plan; he would take the eastern side, speed up his pace, and cut in ahead of his rival; but he was only half way across, when he spotted the dim form of the other in the open—too far off for him to distinguish the man's features or even his body characteristics; but still within rifle range. And Big Hutton was a crack shot. In a jiffy he had settled himself and pulled up his gun. Bang! The man's body buckled and went down. Big Hutton laughed.

"A friend, eh? Well, that's what I give to any friend what comes snooping around when he ain't wanted. That makes two. But it won't matter, because I'll not be at the railroad any longer than it'll take me to pick up a check. But now that it's done, I'll just keep on the trail all night, so's to make her by morning."

Down at Woods Point, old Crossly Barrows had been purchasing furs for years. He was trader, storekeeper, and a whole lot else; but most of all he was a judge of men. The fall before, he had seen Hutton come in, had sold him an outfit, and had advised him as to the fur country; but he had not said a thing about the silver foxes because—well, that particular family of pelts had always ranged over the trapping grounds of Tom Stone. The young man had been after them for two years, and Crossly was hoping that he would get them—hoping, for the sake of the trapper, and because he himself would net a handsome profit on the sale.

Consequently, on this morning when a big man had opened the door and walked up to ask him what he would pay for a pair of silvers, Crossly was a bit surprised. The man tossed the pelts on the counter.

"Silvers," he announced with the manner of a baron. "You want to buy?"

Crossly Barrows was a shrewd merchant. Like a careful buyer, he adjusted the spectacles on his nose; but, for all that, he could not conceal the eager look in his eyes.

"Humph!" he mumbled, reaching out. "Danged if they ain't. Silvers! Just as

sure as I'm alive. Where did you get them?"

"Get them!" The big man looked around at the shelves of the store and then down at the top of the little man's head. "Get 'em?" he asked. "Why, where do you suppose? Did you think I picked 'em off a tree? I caught 'em, of course. What I want to know is, do you want tuh buy?"

And still the little man leaned over; he was thinking of Tom Stone, and wondering. Also he was sparring for time; it would not do to appear too eager.

"Why——" he answered hesitantly, "of course I want to buy. That's my business. I——"

But Big Hutton was in a hurry.

"How much?" he interrupted gruffly.

The price and the money was the only thing that mattered with the crook. In the back of his head lay the vision of a man falling in the snow; he had reason enough to desire a quick get-away. Altogether, he was ready to accept any price; the decision lay with the trader. But just at that moment, the door opened behind him, and he saw the little merchant glance over his spectacles; his thin lips had drawn tight, and his eyes were staring.

Something touched the big man in the back; a thing that drove a chill of stark terror through his spine. A voice, a ghost's voice, was speaking.

"Well, Big Hutton. So you're selling furs, eh? Silver foxes! Up with your hands. That's it! Up! Higher! You're pretty lucky that the sheriff and the law is here to keep me from pluggin' you. Now turn around. Hey? How about it? Do you know who I am? Take a good look, now, to be sure."

It was the voice of Tom Stone! The big man could not believe his ears; he could not move. So the other stepped around in front; a .45 was pointing up toward the crook's nose; and behind it was the face of Tom Stone. And back of the young man was the sheriff, booted, armed, and ready to do his work. Tom Stone was still talking.

"Sly as a fox, weren't you? Thought you had me. You must have watched me set that trap, and then beat me to it in the morning. Nice snowy weather. Just right! Tracks covered up and all. Only I got there before the footprints were entirely covered. I knew some one had been there; but I wasn't calculating on murderers. However, when I stepped on the spot where you had cut the ice, I learned a lot. But you weren't smart enough. While you were telling me your past history, right there I was planning to beat you at your own game. You didn't figure that a man could get out of that ice pack and over the falls, did you? And neither would any one else, other than myself. But you see, I just happened to know of a break on the south side where the water went over in volume, where a man could go over, and have a chance if he was a good swimmer. So, just when you were reaching out with your foot, I was setting my distance. You didn't hurt me at all; I merely ducked and headed for the break in the south rim of the cataract. The current did the rest. I landed at the bottom and made for the shore and the safety of the brush. Five minutes later I watched you peering over the top. You had my guns, and I was wet and almost frozen. Besides that, I had a problem to solve.

"You see, Hutton," he went on, "your place is in the pen, and I knew it; only I didn't know how to get you there. I could have followed you over to my cabin, taken you by surprise, and got the drop on you. But you are an almighty big man to carry to the railroad as a dead weight, you know, and I might have had a lot to explain. And besides, if I marched you ahead of me at the point of a gun, you might have turned the tables on me at any moment. So, I decided to let you bring yourself in. Those silver foxes were the best bait in the world. But for all that, I could not help giving you a scare when you were going up the mountain. Perhaps you heard me yell. Then I took some matches from my waterproof box, built a fire to dry out, headed for your cabin, had coffee, wrote that note, and lit out. I didn't see you again, until we met last night on the plateau. It was a rather unpleasant race for me, because you had the guns and I had nothing. But I fooled you again. You fired; but I faked being shot just in time. I know something about shooting, and I spotted you at the luckiest moment of my life. So we're both here, now, and I guess I'll turn you over to my friend, the sheriff."

# Bobcat Knew His B'ars

By Harrison Conrard

Illustrated by Roy Williams

*The horse turned on all its dynamic energy in a bewildering upheaval and things became a confused blur; to Bobcat.*

NO, sonny, you stay right here," "Bobcat" Birch decreed in an uncompromising tone. "Things ain't altogether set for you yet, and you can't go out until they are."

"What do you mean by things not being set?" Larry Cogswell demanded.

"Just that they ain't set, that's all. You can't expect to turn your picture box loose on a bunch o' b'ars, or other varmints, the very first mornin' after makin' camp, and you ought to know it."

He was in the act of rigging his horse, and now, having drawn the cinch tight and secured it, he stepped up into the saddle.

"I don't see why," Larry contended stubbornly. "I've got to get pictures."

"I savvy that, sonny; but first off it's me for a little pasear and some scoutin' before we get down to business."

"But why can't I go scouting with you? I'll take my camera along, and if we run onto anything interesting——"

"I said I'm goin' scoutin' first," Bobcat checked him in a sharp tone, "and I mean to go alone. No sense in you rampagin' round over the hills until I spot varmint sign; then I'll come back, and get you and the dogs, and we'll run the critters down. And don't you worry, young feller. I know my b'ars, and I'll see that you get plenty o' pictures. You can bet on that."

That was his job. Bobcat Birch, mighty hunter, had signed up with a Hollywood picture outfit to pilot a cameraman on an expedition for films of varmints in their native Arizona wilds. The pictures were to be educational, alive, thrilling and full of action when possible, and Bobcat had contracted to furnish the movie stars for these silent dramas of the forest. And now look what Hollywood had sent him!

Larry Cogswell was a slender youth of twenty or thereabout, with straw-colored hair and a feeble little mustache of the same shade. Bobcat had expected a seasoned old sportsman, and, the moment he had set eyes on Larry, he had formed a distinct prejudice against him, especially since the young man wore checkered plus

fours. As a result, he was already disgruntled and sick of his job.

In striking contrast to Larry, the crabbed old hunter was tall, lank, grayheaded, his lean face bristled with a stubby beard; his eyes were hard and keen as those of a lynx; and his attire comprised a faded blue jumper and overalls, floppy black hat, and boots run down at the heel.

"All right, Bobcat, if that's your method," Larry yielded, resignedly. "But I'd much rather go right along with you."

"Well, you can't that's all," Bobcat snapped at him. "You see, sonny, I've got to sort o' look after you out here in the sticks. I happen to know that there's an old killer that's always snoopin' round these pertickler parts, and we've got to be on the watch for her. I'd feel terrible low-down mean if she was to get her claws on you and spoil them purty clothes of yours."

"What kind of a killer?" Larry inquired with mild interest.

"A big, old brown she-b'ar, and she's a bad 'un for fair. I know, for she put me on the gallop once. So I ain't goin' to take no chances on your gettin' all scratched up, and mebbe et. My first job's got to be to make things safe for you, before riskin' you out in the timber."

"I'm not afraid of bears!" Larry poohpoohed the idea. "But maybe you'd better tell me what she looks like so I'll know her if I should run across her."

"She'll introduce herself right off when she sees you." Bobcat chuckled. "But if you have time to look, and ain't too scairt to notice, you'll see that she's as big as a house and has got only an ear and a half. She lost a big slice off her left ear in a scrap, or somethin', some time in her life, and there's a wide white scar down her nose. She's a noble varmint, all right, and when I kill her——"

"But," Larry interrupted hurriedly, "you must remember, Bobcat, that your contract says you're not to kill except in an extreme emergency."

"That's all right," Bobcat said complacently; "but there's bound to be one o' them things you mention when me'n the Killer come together."

"A killer!" Larry flung out his hands. "Glory be, but I'd like to get a chance to shoot her!"

"With that shiny little popgun?" Bobcat sent a contemptuous glance to the .38 automatic that Larry carried in an armholster.

"Oh, no, Bobcat! Not that!" Larry laughed. "I mean with my camera."

"You can shoot 'er with your picture box after I've shot 'er with my good old reliable buffalo gun."

"But——"

"Gr-r-r-r!" Bobcat growled in his throat. He had had enough of Larry's prattle, and, with a dig of his heels, he sent his mount away at a stiff trot.

Bobcat's leisurely scouting expedition took him in a wide circle about the pine-covered hills, across canyons, and up and down steep, brushy slopes. He found plenty of bear signs—rotted logs ripped open in search of grubs, shallow pits where roots had been dug out, and tracks, both cub tracks and the imprint of paws of enormous size. He decided that after dinner he would take the dogs, now on leash in camp, and he would soon lead that young movie squirt to scenes that would make his eyes bulge. He chuckled when he thought of Larry Cogswell being too scared to turn the crank.

He had come within a mile of camp, on his roundabout return, when his horse gave a sudden snort and planted its feet in a firm halt. Simultaneously, Bobcat heard a rustle in the brush, up ahead. Then an infant cub came lumbering into view, stopped short, and squatted to stare at him in wide-eyed wonder.

"Now ain't this one grand piece o' luck!" Bobcat slipped from the saddle. "I'm sure proud to meet you, you little rascal," he saluted the cub in his most seductive tones. "You're just what I been lookin' for!"

The horse trembled, and registered its distrust of the furry creature by snorting violently, and pawing the earth with a petulant foot. Bobcat patted it and tried to quiet its fears; then, taking no chances on being left afoot, he snubbed it to a near-by pine sapling by a twist of the reins.

"Now ain't you one purty little pup!" Bobcat cooed, turning back to the fascinated cub and advancing a few paces toward it on tiptoe.

He halted, squatted on his heels, and cocked his head to one side to return the woolly creature's impudent stare.

"If that movie boy was only on hand," he ruminated, "right here'd be my chance to break him in easylike on a real b'ar. And wouldn't that baby be somethin' marvelous for him to start in on!" Then a sudden inspiration came to him. "It's my job to see that the kid gets pictures, whether we hit it off together or not, and right here's number one. I'll just corral the little varmint and tote it up to him. I'll soon show that Larry boy that Bobcat Birch knows his b'ars."

He shuffled forward a foot or two. The cub was a trusting little beast. Its inborn fear of the animal that walked upright on its hind legs, its most dreaded enemy, was still latent in its young brain. It sat perfectly still, unafraid, blinking at Bobcat wonderingly.

Bobcat eased himself to his hands and knees and began crawling forward slowly, talking in soothing tones all the while. He halted when he had approached to within a couple of feet of the cub. He must not try to impose his charm too swiftly; it was well to let the young varmint get used to the man smell gradually.

"Son, you're just about the cutest little beggar I ever seen," Bobcat flattered it. "How'd you like to get in the movies? I'll bet you would! Well, if you'll be good, and act nice and purty, I'll sure put you over. How does that strike you?"

He began to move again. The hypnotized cub perked its head to one side to study the giant daddy longlegs that came crawling slowly toward it. It may have had a first faint suspicion that this grotesque creature was the fearsome man animal; but, if so, that suspicion was now blunted by the unctuous tones that melted against its stubby ears.

It made no protest when one of those broad hands gently stroked its muzzle. In another moment it tumbled over and rolled to its side like a fluffy ball, to abandon itself to the thrill of caresses that it had never known before.

"I wonder what your ma'd say if she was to catch me ticklin' your ribs this way?" Bobcat speculated as he slipped a few inches nearer and scratched it behind a foreleg. "Wouldn't she be some hostyle? Well, never you mind your ma. Just you take it easy, son, and you'll be in the movies bimeby."

He took the bandanna from his neck and ripped it down the middle. With no more than a slight demonstration of curiosity, the cub submitted docilely when, first its forelegs were tied together, and then its hind legs, so it could be carried behind the saddle peg.

"Now, you cunnin' little walloper," Bobcat assured it as he gathered it in his arms, "you're goin' to take a ride on the purty horsey. Nobody's goin' to hurt you so just you set easy and don't fret."

A difficulty arose when the horse refused to have anything to do with the cub. It disapproved of bears, big and little, and threatened to break away and stampede, when Bobcat approached it with that bundle of wool in his arms.

In the end, it was necessary for him to resort to strategy. He placed the captive on a high rock, then mounted, and succeeded, after many trials, in backing up close enough to reach out and grab it.

But the horse was not deceived. It knew that it was being made to carry the despised thing, and, for a minute or two, Bobcat had all he could do to maintain the unity of the group.

After a while, the horse's nervousness abated somewhat, and it submitted sullenly to the humiliation of having to carry the offensive burden. Its distrust persisted, however, and it manifested itself at intervals in snorts and abrupt sidesteps, which, once or twice, came near unseating its rider.

The cub squirmed about in an effort to get a paw in its mouth. Bobcat slipped a rein end between its lips. It sucked the leather contentedly, snuggled up closer and went to sleep.

"So you're hungry, are you, you fat little rascal?" Bobcat pressed it closer to his bosom and began crooning an impromptu lullaby.

He started down into the deep canyon that led up to the camp, now hardly half a mile away. The cub, nestling against his friendly bosom, slept on like a tired infant.

The horse picked up and put down its feet gingerly. It seemed to feel that it was transporting a package of high explosives and that a careless step, an incautious slip or a stumbling jar might bring swift disaster.

"Smooth as grease in a hot fryin' pan,"

Bobcat chortled. "Won't that movie kid's eyes pop clean out of his head? Bet he'll get scared and try to shinny up a tree."

He had proceeded along the narrow canyon floor no more than a hundred yards, when the rattle of sliding shale and the dull sound of tumbling boulders drew his quick glance up the steep slope of the wall. Then came a menacing growl, which was promptly answered by a squeal and a convulsive movement from the suddenly awakened cub, accompanied by a snort and a whistle from the horse.

"Good grief!" Bobcat groaned when he saw a huge brown creature, with half of one ear missing and a white scar down its nose, smashing through the brush in a crashing descent of the wall. "Here comes your ma! It's the Killer—and she's bigger'n a house and seein' red!"

The horse halted abruptly and stood in a palsy of terror.

"Shake your hocks!" Bobcat importuned the paralyzed mount. "Here she comes!"

Another savage growl came from up the canyon wall. The cub squealed a response in baby bear language and twisted itself about in a frantic effort to escape the arms that held it.

The horse remained frozen for the briefest moment. Then its internal agitation erupted into a plunging panic. The first lunge pitched the cub forward over the saddle peg; the baby bear promptly hooked its claws into the withers and held hard and fast. The frenzied horse bawled and pitched. The cub clawed deeper. Bobcat swore.

There came another ferocious growl, ominously near, and the horse turned on all its dynamic energy in a bewildering upheaval. It spun about in giddy circles. Bobcat was caught in a vortex from which everything was a confused blur. He reached for his .45; then a cold sweat oozed from his pores. It had been jerked from its holster in the upheaval. He thought of his rifle; but he was now too busy trying to hold on to snap it from its scabbard.

Indistinctly, he saw something leap forward from behind him, then plant itself only a few yards away.

"Action! More action!" A high treble pierced the dizzy commotion of bawls, squeals, growls, yells, and thudding hoofs. "Gorgeous, Bobcat! Simply gorgeous! A great climax! Higher, Bobcat! That's the stuff! Great! Great! Hold it! There! I've got the big girl in the picture now!"

"Shoot 'er! Shoot 'er!" Bobcat screeched; then yanking desperately at the cub: "Turn loose, you varmint, and give a feller a chance!"

His hands twisted into the fluffy hair. The claws sank deeper. The horse went higher. Through the blur before his eyes, Bobcat saw Larry Cogswell, with the camera in front of his face, coolly and deliberately grinding the crank.

"Shoot 'er, you fool!" Bobcat yelped. "Can't you see it's the Killer?"

"Shoot her?" A high, thin, exultant laugh. "I'll say I'll shoot her! Shooting her right now! Wouldn't miss it for the world! She's coming on all fours—not on her hind legs like the pictures in the story books. And so it's the Killer! Marvelous! Great! Speed up, Bobcat! Make it snappy! More action!"

"You wall-eyed fool!" Bobcat screamed, as his head began to pop. "She'll get us both! Pull your gun and kill 'er!"

"Oh, my goodness, no! I wouldn't think of killing the poor thing!" And the crank kept grinding. "Unless there's an extreme emergency!" Then another exultant laugh. "A close-up of a real bear on the peck! Thrilling! She's almost at the horse's tail! And still on all fours! More pep, Bobcat! But wait a moment until I shift my position. There! Wonderful! Attaboy!"

"You d-d-d——!" The unspoken word stuttered to the snapping of Bobcat's head, which was now whipping violently to keep pace with the nimble skyrocketing of the horse. Then he lost a stirrup—and his balance.

"Great!" shrilled the movie man. "Just a little higher, Bobcat! The old girl's charging! Action!"

Bobcat knew that the inevitable had come. He tried desperately to postpone it by anchoring his fingers in the hair of the squealing cub. Suddenly the horse put its last ounce of energy into a supreme effort. Then he felt himself shooting through space; daylight went out, and the whole world split asunder with a terrifying crash, like the crack of doom.

Hot tears were streaming down his cheeks and the pungent odor of ammonia,

emanating from a silver flask, was in his nostrils when consciousness came slowly back to him. He tried to lift his head, but a firm hand pressed it back on the leg of a pair of checkered plus fours, where it was pillowed.

"Didn't she get us?" he asked feebly, turning his smarting eyes up to a dinky little straw-colored mustache.

"Who get us?" came the counter-query.

"Why, the b'ar, the old she-b'ar—the Killer!"

"She did not," Larry replied, with his short, irritating laugh. "You know, Bobcat, it's quite necessary that we cameramen who go into the wilds for pictures of ferocious animals be fully prepared for any emergency. Many times in Africa and India, and often even here in America, I've had to bring a most interesting picture to an abrupt end."

"Well, you don't need to take it so hard," Bobcat cut in, seeing a flood of tears pouring from Larry's eyes. "What you crying about? And, while you're at it, I wish you'd tell me just what am I crying about, too."

"This is wonderful luck, Bobcat!" Larry exulted, ignoring his questions. "I took a little stroll and just happened to be close by, back in the brush, when you picked up the cub. Got a clear view and shot that scene with my telescopic lens. It was great! And then came this marvelous climax!"

"Climax my eye! That was the old Killer herself," Bobcat said dazedly through his tears. "But where's she at? And the cub? And do you reckon I'm bad hurt?"

"You're not hurt much," Larry assured him. "Just a bump when you spilled, right after I turned a tear gas bomb loose under the nose of the Killer. She took to the brush, leaving a trail of tears behind her. Got some of it myself when I dashed in and cut the cub free—the cub came off when you did. I then sent it trundling way after its mother, spilling tears at every step."

"And you just scared the old she-b'ar off?" Bobcat asked in stark amazement.

"You might call it that. Hope she sticks around, for I must get some more pictures of you and her and the cub."

"Well, I dunno about that," said Bobcat dubiously, lifting himself groggily to a sitting posture and drawing his sleeve across his drenched eyes. "Anyhow, if you can scare b'ars away, Larry—which don't surprise me a great sight—I've got a fool notion in my head that mebbe me 'n' you can sort o' travel together after all. You've sure got a pile o' nerve and a heap o' savvy for a city guy."

"You're a marvel yourself, Bobcat," Larry praised him, with a twinkle in his flooded eye. "You know your bears, all right, but in future pictures, please remember that I must have just a little more action. It's action I want, Bobcat—action!"

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# Coyotes Reach Alaska

THE coyote is an unwelcome visitor in Alaska, and every possible means is being taken to make him a total stranger there.

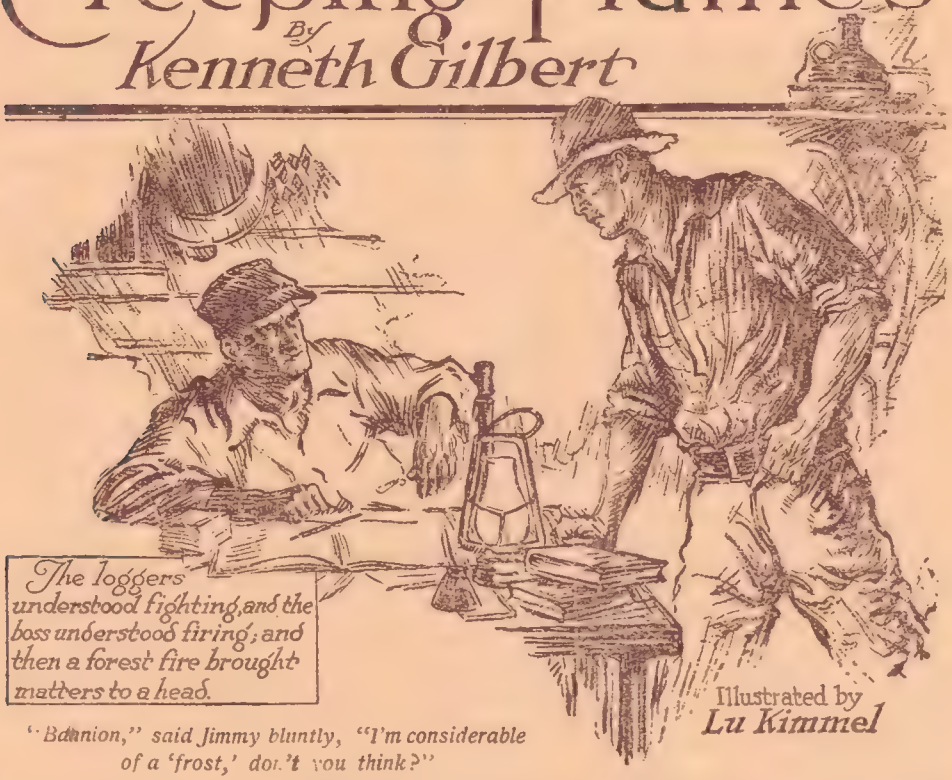
Just recently, a coyote was trapped near Wasella, Alaska—the first of its breed to be found in the vicinity of Anchorage, Alaska—and its presence has been much advertised. This coyote, or brush wolf, has been declared by R. K. Stewart, who is in charge of the coyote extermination campaign, to be a true prairie wolf, an immigrant, evidently, from east of the Rockies. Men have come from forty miles away to view its gray pelt, which measures some four feet ten inches from nose tip to tail tip. The animal had brown legs like those of a red fox, and a black tuft at the end of the tail.

Every precaution is being taken to rid Alaska of this pest, as an evergrowing peril to Alaska's fur-bearing and small game animals. Only within the last few years have coyotes been reported at all in northwestern Canada or Alaska, but now they have been seen in many sections.

Means of precaution include the training of husky and Malemute trail dogs and even imported wolfhounds, to scent out coyote dens; and the supplying of printed instructions to trappers as to how to trap coyotes. The valuable fur-bearing animals are being protected in every possible way.

# Creeping Flames

By Kenneth Gilbert



*The loggers understood fighting, and the boss understood firing; and then a forest fire brought matters to a head.*

Illustrated by *Lu Kimmel*

*"Bannion," said Jimmy bluntly, "I'm considerable of a 'frost,' don't you think?"*

INTO the office of Bannion, the camp boss, stalked Mike Darragh, who drove the logging engine of the Port Douglas Lumber Company, from the camp, which was located six miles back in the timber, down to tidewater. He hurled his cap savagely into a far corner. Darragh and Bannion had long been friends—*tillikum* is the Chinook word for it that Pacific Northwest loggers use—and the engineer always felt free to unburden himself to his superior.

Bannion, hunched over his desk, where he was scanning invoices of supplies for the camp, looked up. Then he smiled slowly, maddeningly, and pursed his lips in a manner that always infuriated Darragh.

"Drat ye, Bannion!" cried the big Irishman instantly. "Some time ye'll go too far. If I hadn't broken my fist on the iron jaw of a logger last winter, I'd——"

But he left the sentence unfinished, as Bannion grinned at him without fear.

"What's up, Mike?" asked the boss, sobering. "Some one insult your engine again?"

"If they only would!" breathed the Irishman, with evident relish at the thought of a fight. "But no, 'tis not that. 'Tis the new chief, young Jimmy Stratton."

Bannion frowned. Stratton was the son of old Jake Stratton, who had built up the Port Douglas Lumber Company from a one-horse logging outfit to the preeminent position it occupied in the timber-producing world. Darragh and Bannion had helped old Jake in the successful struggle he had waged; but now he had cut his last Douglas fir, and his son had taken over the reins.

"Jimmy's all right," ventured Bannion. "He's young, and maybe he has too much education for this job, but don't forget that he's old Jake's son, and there never was a better fighter than 'Skookum' Stratton."

Darragh grunted.

"Aye, a son he is, but that's all," he retorted. "He's been coddled, I'm tellin' ye, Bannion. He's no man to lead us, and we're about ready to tackle the biggest cut

of timber we've ever made. He's yellow, I'm tellin' ye, Bannion!"

The camp boss stood up.

"Look here, you old shellback!" he said sharply. "If I didn't know that you don't really mean what you say half the time, I'd break every bone in your head for saying that. Jimmy Stratton's all right, I say!"

"Is he now?" replied Darragh scornfully. "Ask any man in the camp. They're saying that he's no real man, but just a weaklin', whose only strength is the fact that he controls our jobs. And men won't work out here, and do it as they should, for wages alone, Bannion. These loggers want a real man to lead 'em; one that they respect. And they don't respect young Stratton."

Bannion's frown deepened. Darragh spoke truth concerning the men. It was fact, of course, that they would work for wages alone; but without the loyalty given to a real boss, the record which fighting old Skookum Stratton had set and maintained as a two-fisted leader who won men's hearts although he might break their heads, would go into the discard.

"Explain yourself, Mike," said Bannion. He knew that the old engineer was seldom wrong.

"'Twas this mornin'," replied Darragh. "Jackson, the faller, was notchin' a tree, and doin' it careless, if I do say so. I was there at the time; I'd got off my engine to go over and ask Stratton if he was goin' to ride down to the end of the line like he'd promised.

"'Ye're doin' it wrong, Jackson,' says young Jimmy. 'Ye waste too much lumber that way, and it's no easier for the settler who comes after us, to pull the stump. The forestry school has found a better way,' says he, 'and that's the way I want it done. Like this,' says he, showin' Jackson what he meant.

"Now, Jackson's a good man, even if he is hot-headed. He looks up at Stratton, scornfullike, and I could see his face gettin' red.

"'And who told ye that ye knew anything about this work?' says Jackson. 'I'll have ye know,' says he, 'that I was fallin' trees when ye was chewin' a teething ring!'

"And what does young Jimmy Stratton do, then, Bannion?" burst out Darragh, "What does he do, I'm askin' ye? Instead of haulin' off, and bustin' Jackson in the jaw, like old Skookum would have done, why, he looks black for a second, and he says:

"'I'll have no back talk from ye, Jackson. Either you do it my way, or I'll fire ye!'

"Of course, Jackson did it Stratton's way, not carin' to go about losin' his job. But word of the thing has got around, and the men are sayin' that Stratton has no real sand, that he's just a pay-roll boss, and no better!"

Bannion looked out of the window, and did not reply. At last he turned to Darragh:

"Mike," he said, "of course you and I understand each other. And just between us, I'm afraid you're right. Young Jimmy has been here a month, and he hasn't impressed the men as a real go-getter. I don't know why, either; he's a chip off the old block, too. He has his dad's strength—he was a football star at college, you know. And likewise he was a good amateur boxer when he was at school. But he doesn't seem to understand that what these men want is a walloper of a boss, instead of one who stands back and holds the threat of discharge over them. I'll try to make him see what I mean, some way, but I doubt whether I can. It's something that he'll have to discover for himself.

"But, mark me, Darragh! When Jimmy Stratton does see the light, these scrappy loggers won't yearn for action any longer. He can whip the best man among 'em," went on Bannion in a burst of confidence.

"But that won't be his way," he continued thoughtfully. "If he works out his own salvation, it will be along different lines. A new generation is with us, Mike. New ways; new ideas. Meanwhile, you'll play Jimmy Stratton's game the same as I'm going to do. If anybody opens his mouth about Stratton, you close it!"

The engineer groped with a hairy, oil-begrimed paw for the hand of his friend.

"I'm with ye, Bannion, for the sake of old Skookum Stratton," he said loyally.

That night, as Bannion burned oil while he worked on his reports, Stratton came into the office. He was still in his late twenties; a square-shouldered, well-set-up

man who had his father's firm chin and mouth, and steady eyes. He was dressed like a logger, in stagged trousers, calked shoes, and plaid shirt, but there was an unsoiled, brisk air about him which seemed to clash with the serviceable clothes he wore; it was as though he were dressed for show.

"Bannion," he said bluntly, "I'm considerable of a 'frost,' don't you think?"

The camp boss reached for his pipe, and lighted it, masking the smile that crept to his lips. Here was old Skookum Stratton himself, going straight to the point, as usual.

"Jimmy," replied Bannion, "you are."

Stratton nodded, matter-of-factly. If Bannion had tried to hedge or evade the issue, Stratton would have scorned him; but he knew that the camp boss was too honest and true a friend for that.

"I'm well convinced of it," went on Stratton. "I've put myself into a hole, and it's going to take time for me to square things. As a second thought, I'm going to go away, and turn the camp over to you. I came unexpectedly upon a group of the men talking back of the bunk house a few minutes ago. They were talking about me. I'm too much of a dude to be a successful logging operator, I guess."

Bannion looked at him keenly.

"You're not afraid of them, are you?" he asked.

Young Stratton dropped his eyes, and thought for a moment. Then he smiled.

"You certainly are frank, aren't you?" he remarked. "But it's good to have some one to talk to.

"Afraid of them?" he went on. "Well, I don't know. They're different from the men I've been used to. You know dad kept me in school practically all of the time. He wanted me to learn this business in a scientific way, but it never seemed to have occurred to him that I had to understand the men working for me. I don't think that I spent more than a week in one of his camps until after his death. Apparently he thought I'd take hold of a crew the way he did."

Stratton got up and stretched himself.

"About this going away," put in Bannion. "That would be bad. The men wouldn't understand; they'd think you had run away from the fight. Besides, you know we're right in the dead of the forest fire season. There's been no rain for three weeks, and the woods are like tinder. Do you know, young man, that if a fire starts with a strong south wind blowing, it will wipe out the camp and this stand of timber? That's one of the things you'll have to learn in this game; that a fire can break you overnight."

"Maybe you're right," agreed Stratton soberly. "I'll wait, for a time."

When the boy had gone, Bannion sat smoking and thinking for some time. Then, an odd light in his eyes, he went to the telephone which connected the camp with civilization. To the query of the long-distance operator, he said:

"Get me the State firewarden at the capital, please."

There was a long wait, and then a masculine voice came over the wire. Bannion launched into an earnest conversation, with much explaining. He lowered his voice, and frequently glanced at the door, as though fearing that some one would come by and overhear. The name of old Skookum Stratton was mentioned frequently. At last there came assent, and he hung up the receiver.

"Skookum," he apostrophized the dead timber king who had been his friend, "you were some man, all right, and your influence hasn't gone yet. They haven't forgotten, down there at the State house. What I'm doing for your son is for you."

Then he went to bed.

Early next morning, Bannion left camp, with the announcement that he was going to look over another stand of timber about two miles from camp. He wanted to see, he said, if it was threatened in any way by the fires of varying degree which were being fought by rangers and their crews at near-by points.

It was midafternoon when he returned, and there was a worried look on his face. The smoke haze, which endures, in the fir regions, from spring until fall, except when an unusually heavy downpour quenches the fires, had become thicker.

The camp was idle. Men lay stretched in the shade, smoking, telling stories, or playing cards. The donkey engine which operated the "high-lead," or trolley, which swung logs through the air from where they were felled, to the loading platform, was steamless, her fires dead. Backed against a string of flat cars, however, was

the little locomotive of Mike Darragh. A wavering plume of vapor rising from her safety valve, indicated that her pilot still held her in readiness.

Young Stratton hurried up to Bannion, something like relief on his face at sight of the camp boss.

"They've closed us down," said Stratton. "State firewarden called just after you left, and ordered us to quit work and to guard our fires until the fire hazard is past."

Bannion looked up at the hazy sky, where the sun shone like a burnished, glowing ruby above the trees. His left eye closed in a wink.

"Don't blame him," said the camp boss. "The whole woods are like a powder magazine, just waiting for a match. It only needs a spark from a donkey engine, or the cook's ranges to start things going—and a south wind to finish it.

"Right this minute," he went on, "the rangers are fighting a fire scarcely a mile from here. There's a little breeze blowing, just enough to make the blaze hard for them to handle. We're due for a blow. If it comes before they get this fire out, and before it rains, Heaven help us!"

Young Stratton frowned.

"But the fire warden said he might keep us closed down for weeks!" he exclaimed. "The overhead costs of the camp will be frightful. I know something about figures; I specialized in logging costs when I was in forestry school."

Bannion sighed. Yet he shot a keen glance at the young man.

"Well, you can't help it," he said. "There's only one thing you can do—lay the men off! Tell 'em to go to town and enjoy themselves, at their own expense. It's either that, or stand the expense of keeping them here."

The boy frowned.

"Fire three hundred men?" he asked. "That would be a job for you to handle, Bannion; you're the camp boss!"

Bannion's face hardened.

"Probably it is, but I'll do no such thing!" he retorted. "Your dad wouldn't have asked me to do it; he'd have done it himself, if he'd wanted to. But my guess would be that he was enough of a sport to be able to stand an overhead loss rather than turn out a crew of good men. It's the test of a real boss that you're up against, son. You'll do the firing yourself, or not at all!"

He turned away, and made for the logging engine, where Mike Darragh was waiting expectantly.

"Mike," said Bannion soberly, "you'd better slip a coupling pin or two into your hip pocket, and stand by for trouble. I've put the boy up against the real thing, just like his dad would have liked to have me do.

"Trouble's looming," he continued seriously. "I thought I had a smart plan last night, but the frame-up is turning out to be the real thing. I got the State firewarden to order Jimmy to close down on account of the fire hazard. I knew the boy would kick at the overhead, so the only thing he can do is to swallow it or try to fire this crowd of loggers. *Try,* I said, Mike. He couldn't fire 'em in a hundred years. They won't stand for it.

"But let me tell you that the fire hazard is real. There's a blaze back there in the timber that may make it tough for us if it gets a south wind behind it, and, unless I'm a poor weather prophet, we're due for that wind right now. I can feel the change coming; there'll be rain on the heels of it, but first there'll be a pretty stiff gale.

"Of course, we don't want to lose the crew," he explained. "But I wanted to put Jimmy up against the real thing; to make him understand that he's got to be more than a pay-roll boss to get by out here. If he's got any fighting blood in him, it will come to the surface now. But we'll stand by, Mike, for he's old Skookum Stratton's boy!"

The engineer grinned, and rubbed his knuckles.

"I'll be standin' by," he declared.

Darkness came at last, a darkness that seemed more like a golden dawn, for overhead the sky was reddened by the glow of forest fires. The south wind was rising, as Bannion had predicted. The camp boss had not as yet seen Jimmy Stratton since their meeting that afternoon; he wondered if the young man had made a decision. The men, with nothing to do, loafed in the bunk house, and discussed the situation. Stratton came in for considerable comment.

Bannion was in his office, finishing some

detail work, when Stratton appeared. The look of indecision on his face had vanished; he was the son of old Skookum Stratton now.

"Bannion," he said shortly, "I've been thinking it over. We may be shut down here for weeks. The overhead is going to be high, but I'm not going to lay the men off!"

The boss looked at the young man keenly.

"Afraid of it, eh?" he asked. Stratton flushed.

"No, I'm not afraid. But I'd rather lose money than discharge these men. They have a right to expect that of me."

Bannion sighed, as though disappointed. Then he chuckled.

"I'm glad to hear you say it, son," he remarked. "Still, I was hoping that you would go through with it. I'll lay my cards on the table. I wanted to put you up against a test that would bring out the character that I know is in you—the same fighting spirit that your dad had. But I guess you'll have to settle it in your own way.

"Let me tell you this, however." He leaned toward Stratton. "The men are not going to appreciate your sacrifice as much as you think. They're disgruntled right now; they have the feeling that you're a dude, if you'll pardon my speaking plainly, and a schoolbook logger. You made a mistake when you didn't fight it out with Jackson, instead of threatening to fire him. I hear that he's been stirring up trouble at the bunk house, and the men are in a mood right now to go on strike. Jackson is the ringleader, and with him is Barclay, that big loader. Either of them can get a job in any camp in the Northwest, so your threat of discharge doesn't carry much weight after all. It won't worry them any."

Jimmy shook his head.

"Whether they appreciate it or not," he replied, "the only thing that I can decently do is to keep them on, even though we are shut down."

Bannion chuckled to himself again, as Stratton went out.

"I wouldn't let him lay 'em off, if it got to that point," he said aloud. "But he won't face the music. Maybe it's better, at that; I've run the risk of stirring up a lot of trouble. But it's for his own good. Well, I'm through. If he won't fight, I can't make him."

Bannion went to bed.

It was perhaps three hours later when he was awakened by a pounding on his door. Mike Darragh was there.

"Come out of it!" yelled the old engineer. "The fire's all but on top of us, and the men are arguin' over whether they'll fight it, or let the camp burn!"

"Where's Stratton?" demanded Bannion, hastily slipping into his clothes.

"Saw him a minute ago, chasin' over to the bunk house," was the reply. "Hurry, man! There's trouble over there now!"

Bannon came out on the jump. What he saw was a leaping line of flame at the very edge of the camp. A hot breath of air, as from a blast furnace, struck him in the face; the south wind, fresh, strong, had come! Moreover, the fire was racing from treetop to treetop—a dreaded "crown" blaze which, under the urge of a stiff breeze, can outrun a man. Showers of sparks, blazing fir needles that were glowing, live coals, were raining over the camp.

Men were pouring out of the bunk house. Bannion ran toward them.

"Start a bucket line from the creek!" he called.

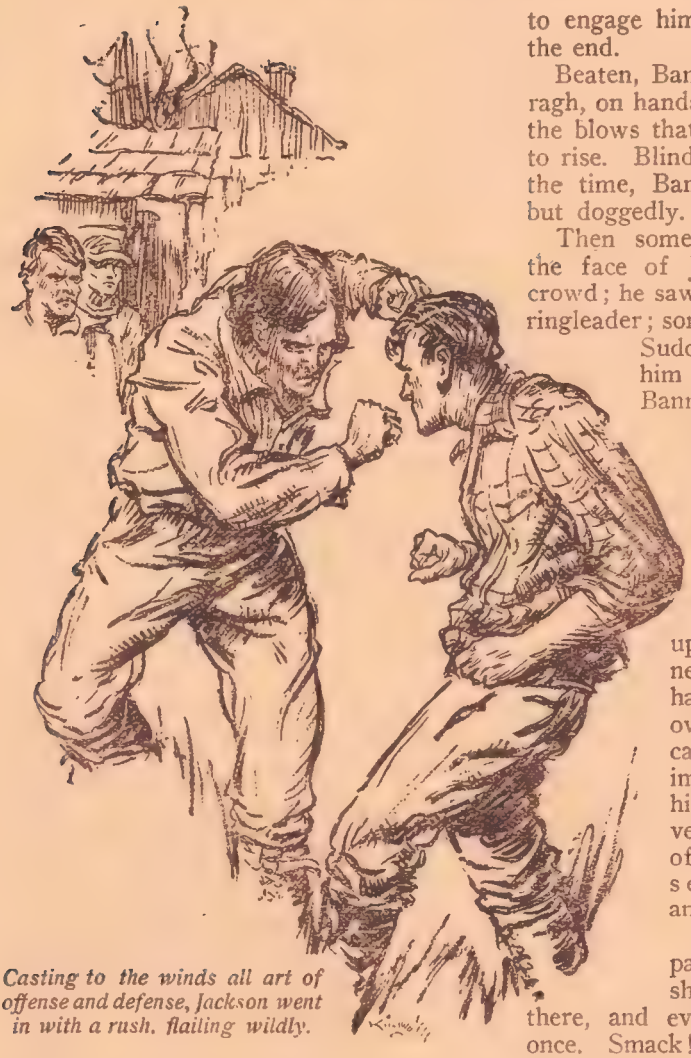
They heard him, stared at him a moment, and then laughed. Then he saw Jackson.

"Let her burn!" cried the big faller. "We've quit!" He led the others on a run toward the logging engine of Mike Darragh, which stood with banked fires, coupled to a string of flat cars at the loading platform. Bannion saw Darragh at the gangway of the engine; saw him swing a brake club on the head of the first man. Then Bannion himself went into the fight.

"You quitters!" he yelled. "Run out on me, will you?"

"We're quittin' the dude, not you, Bannion," was the reply. Bannion, fighting his way to the side of Mike Darragh, had no time to answer. The thing to do was to keep the men from using the engine to flee from the camp, and leave the place to flames.

It was two men—Darragh and Bannion—against a mob. Somehow, the camp boss managed to reach the gangway, where Darragh was battling manfully against



*Casting to the winds all art of offense and defense, Jackson went in with a rush, flailing wildly.*

the loggers. The crew didn't want to hurt the engineer, or Bannion either. But there was no use trifling too long.

"Take 'em, boys!" the beleaguered pair heard Jackson cry.

There was a concerted rush; men literally poured over them, and swept into the gangway of the logging engine. Others, unable to get into the fight, but anticipating its outcome, were already on the flat cars, waiting for the train to start. Swearing, Darragh swung his brake club once more, and then went down. Bannion, alone at bay, fought like a trapped bear. The crew, roaring with the frenzy of a mob, bore harder against the camp boss. Only the fact that there was not room for more than one, or possibly two, to engage him at the same time delayed the end.

Beaten, Bannion fell back. Mike Darragh, on hands and knees, and dazed with the blows that he had received, struggled to rise. Blindly, with eyes closed part of the time, Bannion fought on hopelessly but doggedly.

Then something happened. He saw the face of Jackson, the faller, in the crowd; he saw, too, big Barclay, the other ringleader; something had distracted them. Suddenly, the pressure against him eased; the jam broke. And Bannion saw that which warmed his heart, then and afterward, whenever he remembered it. Jimmy Stratton, scion of the mighty Skookum, was fighting the fight of a man!

Where he had come from, where he had been, up to that moment, Bannion never knew. Perhaps the boy had been wrestling with his own inclinations, his theoretical training that did not hold important the complexes of his men. But beneath this veneer was the fiber and stock of old Skookum Stratton, who settled problems personally and forcefully.

He was lithe, quick as a panther. Despite the heavy shoes he wore, he was here, there, and everywhere, seemingly all at once. Smack! Smack! His fists landed, and under the impacts men went down, and stayed down. They sought to rush him, to overwhelm him by sheer force of numbers, but he either danced away, or cleaved a path for himself.

There were half a dozen men on the ground, some lying prone, others on hands and knees, still others groggily sitting up and holding their jaws, and still the boy fought on. Bannion saw Barclay double up, as though from a solar-plexus blow. And then the rest of the men, still on their feet, but regarding this fighting demon, now, with a wary respect, were suddenly grouped in a ring about Jackson and young Jimmy.

The big faller bore the reputation of being "a hard one to pick." Bannion doubted if there was a man in the whole

crew who could take his measure. Gifted with great strength, he had, in a degree, some of that flashing science in fisticuffs that young Stratton possessed. He rushed in, seeking to clinch, but as Jimmy slammed him with hard rights and lefts, he covered well, and took the punishment. Always, however, he wanted infighting. One crushing grip of those powerful arms, which had driven a saw through green timber for so many years, and his adversary would be helpless.

Quick to read the bigger man's intentions, Jimmy fought a long-range battle. He was cutting the infuriated faller down. Each time that Jackson came within reach, he was jolted hard, not once but several times.

At last Jackson's temper gave way; he cast to the winds all art of offense and defense, and went in with a rush, flailing wildly. One of his tremendous fists caught Stratton alongside the head, and, as the boy staggered, a roar went up from the crowd. And it was not a vindictive roar; Bannion sensed that. It was rather the applause of a crowd who had seen a *coup* counted. In that instant, the men were impartially desirous of seeing the thing fought out; they wanted to see the best man win.

Jackson, thinking to take advantage of his antagonist's momentary discomfiture, plunged forward, and struck again. But, somehow, Jimmy magically wasn't there to receive the blow. He was a good foot to one side, and his left, curving inward with all the strength he could muster, caught Jackson low on the ribs.

The big man grunted, straightened up. Out of the tail of one eye, he saw what was coming, and strove to guard. But he was not quick enough.

Full on the point of the chin he caught it. Sighing, he fell forward.

Silence followed; then, suddenly there rose a strange murmur among the men. Mike Darragh, weaving on his feet, let out a war whoop.

"'Tis old Skookum Stratton himself, in the flesh!"

But Bannion, who had been watching the fight with one eye on that creeping lines of flames at the edge of the camp, gave a different yell. He held his palm upward a moment; then threw his hat into the air.

"Rain, boys! The south wind brought rain, just as I said it would! Thank the Lord!"

Even as it would quench the flames eating their way through the timber, so did those first pattering drops, preliminary to the steady downpour that was under way in ten minutes, quench the hot bitterness in the hearts of the crew. Quick to judge men, they were just as quick to admit their mistake, when that mistake had been shown up. The son of Skookum Stratton was no faint-heart, who relied upon his power to hire or fire men. He was a two-fisted leader, well worthy to command them.

Some one broke the ice. Jimmy found himself shaking hands. Men were crowding around him, even while the rain fell faster; they were talking excitedly, laughing, but beneath it all he felt an undercurrent of warmth, of fellowship, which he would not have bartered for all the wealth he possessed. Disheveled, battered, he stood there and received their adulation; and the rain, wetting his cheeks, hid the tears of joy that somehow he could not hold back.

And if the spirit of old Skookum Stratton looked down, and saw it, he must have smiled at thought that his works and deeds would live after him. His son had met the test of a boss.

# Motoring in Alaska

WHILE good, extensive automobile roads are still more or less of a dream in Alaska, nevertheless, the increased use of motor transportation in Alaska has stimulated road-making, considerably. So far, the Richardson Highway, from Valdez to Fairbanks, a stretch of three hundred and seventy-one miles, is Alaska's longest strip of graded roadway.

But the possibilities of automobile travel in this country of the Northwest are alluring. The making of many cross trails into roads, would provide the tourist with magnificent mountain scenery, as well as views of the vast tundras with their picturesque herds of wild beasts. A motor trip through country such as this would well repay the most jaded traveler.

# Beckoning Lights

By Harold Willard Gleason

THERE are two little gleams that beckon,
As I ride the lonely range,
Two ruddy sparks like stars astray
From the grazing herds of the Milky Way,
And each from dusk till the dawn of day
Wakens a longing strange.

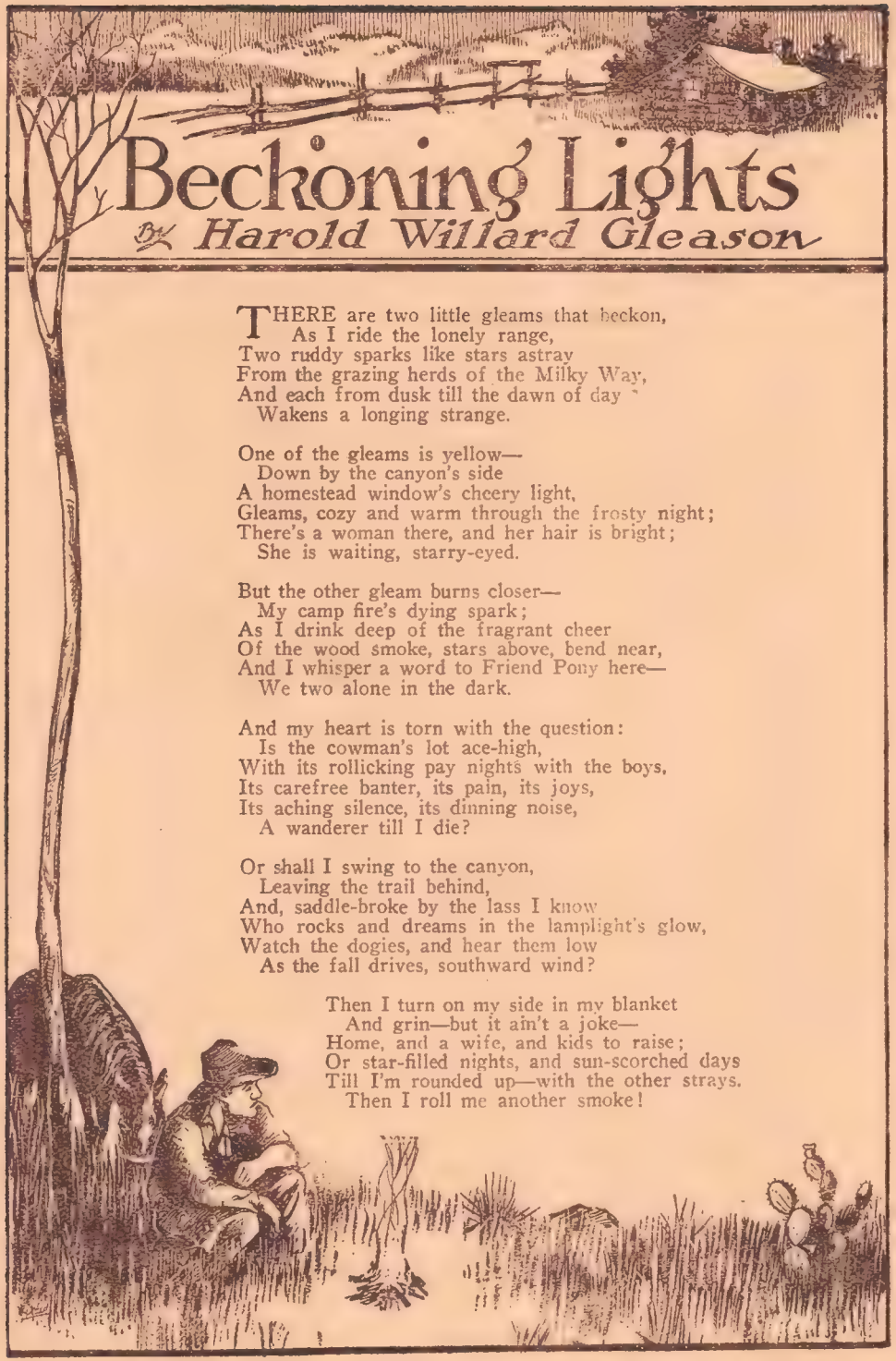
One of the gleams is yellow—
Down by the canyon's side
A homestead window's cheery light,
Gleams, cozy and warm through the frosty night;
There's a woman there, and her hair is bright;
She is waiting, starry-eyed.

But the other gleam burns closer—
My camp fire's dying spark;
As I drink deep of the fragrant cheer
Of the wood smoke, stars above, bend near,
And I whisper a word to Friend Pony here—
We two alone in the dark.

And my heart is torn with the question:
Is the cowman's lot ace-high,
With its rollicking pay nights with the boys,
Its carefree banter, its pain, its joys,
Its aching silence, its dinning noise,
A wanderer till I die?

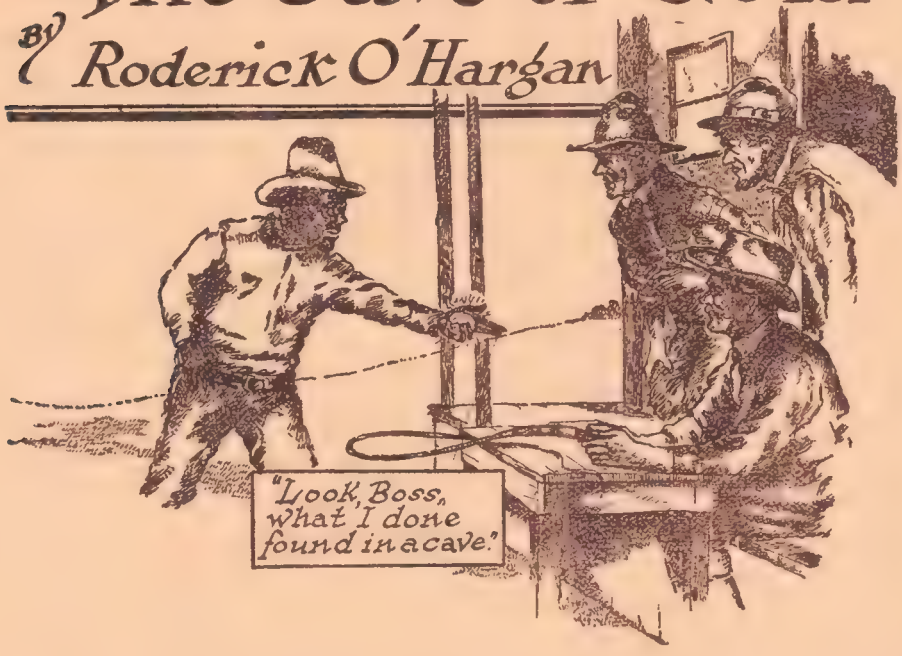
Or shall I swing to the canyon,
Leaving the trail behind,
And, saddle-broke by the lass I know
Who rocks and dreams in the lamplight's glow,
Watch the dogies, and hear them low
As the fall drives, southward wind?

Then I turn on my side in my blanket
And grin—but it ain't a joke—
Home, and a wife, and kids to raise;
Or star-filled nights, and sun-scorched days
Till I'm rounded up—with the other strays.
Then I roll me another smoke!



# Legends of Lost Mines: The Cave of Gold

By Roderick O'Hargan




THE oldest brand inspector will hardly remember the Rising Star, the brand of the Riggs boys. It was known for a short time only, and not very favorably at that. The three Riggs brothers operated a horse ranch in a canyon known as Dropdown Canyon, or Smugglers Canyon, one of the dozens of narrow gaps pitching down to the Rio Grande, in what is now Brewster County, Texas. Some said that the Riggs brothers were professional smugglers and were operating the horse ranch merely as a blind. That doesn't matter, now, but a certain happening on that Rising Star horse ranch does matter, for it concerns a rich deposit of ore, found and lost again.

One day, the personal saddle horse of one of the Riggs brothers got out of the corral and strayed away. The result was an explosion of bad temper on the part of the owner. He stormed at the carelessness of somebody, probably his own, and ordered the two hired hands to get out and find the animal. One of them, a colored man, Jefferson Greenwood, known as Jerry, a horse wrangler, was absent many hours. On his return, he brought back, not the missing horse, but some specimens of gold-splashed ore and a little pouch of gold dust.

"Look, boss, what I done found in a cave! This here's gold stone."

The innocent negro's excitement was thought to be a cheeky bluff by the angry horse owner—just a stall, to divert attention from his long absence and failure to find the lost horse. It changed Riggs' smoldering anger into flaming passion. Flinging the proffered specimens down, he seized the poor negro, strung him up, and flogged him.

When Jerry was cut down, he crept to where the specimens had been knocked from his hand, and looked about. He succeeded in finding several pieces of his prize "gold stone." Taking these, he fled from the district. In the towns he passed through, notably Sanderson and San Antonio, he told often of the cruel treatment he had suffered at the hands of his employers, the Riggs brothers.

"What do you expect from those no-account smugglers?" seemed to be the prevailing opinion of those he talked to. No one was more than mildly interested in his gold stone story until he reached San Antonio. There, his story was related, at second hand, to a jeweler, who bought one of the specimens from Jerry with the intention of making it into a watch charm, but changed his mind and had it assayed. It showed an enormous gold content. The supposed gold-splashed iron cubes in the rock were not iron cubes, but gold cubes, iron-splashed. The specimens were not bits of quartz; they were real nuggets.

The question then arose: was the negro's story true? The jeweler rushed around San Antonio looking for Jerry. Too late! He had left town. However, the jeweler had memorized Jerry's dramatic story of how the specimens had been struck from his hand. He forthwith hastened to the Rising Star Ranch and was fortunate in finding the owners absent. He searched about and was almost instantly rewarded by finding two more cast-off nuggets!

Before the excited finder could hunt for the cave, the Riggs brothers appeared on the scene. The trusting visitor told his story and offered to share his findings with them if they would help him find the place. Greed warped their judgment. At first they claimed they knew of the discovery and that they were in partnership with Jerry. Then, as an afterthought, they claimed that the cave was actually on their ranch and owned by them, and that they had quick-acting six-shooters to keep prowlers off. The visitor from San Antonio was told to get off the place.

He went, taking his specimens with him, but instead of heading for home, he went to El Paso to look up an old acquaintance who, he thought, might advise him, a Mr. Campbell, a railroad man. He found Campbell and told his story. An investigation was made which showed that the Riggs brothers did not own a foot of land, and their rent was long overdue.

"The first move," said the practical Campbell, "is to find that runaway negro."

A railroad detective, put on Jerry's trail, traced him and brought him back. He was given a good job. He could have had several, for by this time the story was known all along the line, and those who had first heard the story and passed it up, all claimed to be Jerry's friend and protector; but Jerry stuck with Campbell. An armed party was made up with Jerry acting as guide. They hastened to Smugglers Canyon, and made camp near the Rising Star Ranch until Jerry got his bearings. He had not marked the trail, he said, but he was sure he could find it by searching for a few days. Then the Riggs brothers appeared, looked over the El Paso party, noted their weapons, and decided to be friendly. The Riggs boys claimed that they had known about the gold cave for a long time, and knew it was on their range, but that they had temporarily forgotten its exact location. They offered to join up with the El Paso men, on a fifty-fifty basis. Campbell was harder boiled than their previous visitor. He replied that they needed no help, that his party would find the cave, unaided.

Then Jerry suddenly disappeared, vanished into thin air, without leaving a trace. His companions tracked him to a spot where his footmarks ceased, and horse tracks started. It was almost certain that he had been kidnaped by one of the Riggs boys. Campbell sat tight and went on searching. As time passed, some of his companions had to return to their homes, but Campbell stuck to it, spending all his daylight hours combing the hills, searching for the nugget cave, and also for the prison of Jerry the negro. Then Jerry's body was found in the Rio Grande with a bullet hole in his skull.

Nothing more was heard for several years. Campbell, his savings spent, had gone back to railroading in El Paso. From time to time, he grubstaked prospectors to search for the Runaway Negro Mine, by this time known all through the country. Among others, he staked a German named Graf.

Then the final sensation! Graf arrived in El Paso one day with an Indian basket filled with nuggets and gold dust. He had found the long lost mine! In those days it was the custom in El Paso to celebrate the return of her wandering children. Certain citizens toasted Graf, and Graf toasted back so enthusiastically that he went to sleep, and from this sleep, he did not waken. He died of heart disease in a lodging house bed, beside which reposed an Indian basket filled with gold-specked ore, but not a scrap of paper to indicate where he got it. The Runaway Negro Mine still defies discovery!

# Mail for You
## In Our Post Office

*Ask Jack Bassett, Postmaster*

If you'd like to swap yarns with other congenial souls, if you have interesting adventures to relate, or information you'd like to give about your part of the country, or ask about some other part, drop a letter in our post office. Letters will be forwarded only between those of the same sex, and no business will be transacted through this department.

TREKKIN' toward Manitoba in March sounds like the answer to an old-timer's prayer. Yes, sir, there's no doubt about it—that there is a good prospectin' and trappin' country. If you don't have an army of woodsmen, trappers, and prospectors on your trail, *muy pronto,* then old Jack misses his guess. The purp Blazes sure is a-yelpin' to go along.

DEAR POSTMASTER BASSETT: I'm looking for a pard who knows something about trapping and prospecting—one of about middle age, who wants to go northward, toward Manitoba, along in March. I suppose you-all know that there's good prospecting and trapping through that country. Yes, sir, and good hunting and fishing, too.

If any of you folks want to try your luck, and can finance your end of an outfit, let's hear you say it! G. G. AHLBAUM.

473 Tweed Avenue, Elmwood, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

We're sure glad to have your greetings, cowgirl.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: Greetings, from sunset land! This wonderful spot of nature is on the western slope of the Colorado Rockies, at an altitude of eight thousand seven hundred feet. Yes, this is Riland, Garfield County, and we have lakes and trout streams too numerous to mention. To call off just a few of them would include Deep Lake, Crater Lake, Lost Lake, Trappers' Lake, and Sweet Water. All of them are within a day's ride of our ranch.

Deep Lake and White River country are chock-full of elk. We had a party out that way last year, and we camped right in the midst of them and took photographs with a motion-picture camera. It's sure some sport to slip up to within thirty or forty yards of them and snap a picture of a big old bull with a huge spread of antlers. There's plenty of game in this country—lots of deer, bear, coyote, and a few lion. You always can find plenty of grouse, sage hens, mountain quail, and wild ducks for a meal.

We keep a fine bunch of saddle horses at the ranch, and guide camping parties all over the range. I'm as much at home in the saddle as are any of the menfolks, and I love the big, cheery camp fire at night. You can have just as large a fire as you want, provided you have the ambition to drag the logs up, after having eaten more crisp mountain trout and Dutch-oven biscuits than you ever imagined wou could hold! And, right here, let me mention, if you don't already know it, that there is nothing that can compare with Dutch-oven biscuits! You've sure missed something, folks, if you haven't spent a few nights around a real camp fire. After every one has told a story or two and the fire burns down, it's fine to crawl into your blankets with the sky for a roof—unless you prefer a tent—and let the whispering spruce and pine lull you to dreamland. Or the quaking aspen, if you happen to be down low enough for them.

We have some real broncs here at the ranch. If any one gets to feeling kind of wild, and thinks he wants to enter the bucking contests at the rodeos, we let him practice up on our Sweet Water Baby, or perhaps on Messwagon. Both are real contest horses. I have one of my own, Wildfire, and no one else in the country would think of getting onto him unless he was expecting a good time before he finished. I often put Wildfire into a bucking contest, just to see some fellow who thinks he can ride him, "go for the leather!" I've ridden him for eight years, and can't run him yet—he will buck every time. Yes, he's thrown me a good many times, too.

I have three others that are real horses; I never let any one ride them. I've broken them all myself, and they won't let any one else walk up to them. Glory, a five-year-old, cream-colored colt, is one of them. I have to shoe him myself, because he won't let a blacksmith pick up his feet.

The Sunset Ranch is owned by my sister and her husband, J. E. Davisson. I am a widow, twenty-eight, and make my home with them. Now, folks, with a "howdy" and very best wishes to all, I'll ride on. MAUD SCHUMM.

Sunset Dude Ranch, Riland, Colorado.

Making plans for a springtime trek.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: I plan to start on a motor camping tour early this spring, and would like to hear from any one who would like to have me drop in on them, en route. Have been in twenty-six States already, and I like camp-

ing, hunting, and everything pertaining to the outdoors. Am thirty-five, and wish especially to hear from those who believe they know of a good opportunity for an ambitious man to locate and make good. BILL MORRIS.
Box 47, Mishawaka, Indiana.

## Are you interested in Indian relics?

DEAR POSTMASTER JACK: I'd like to get in touch with some one who is interested in Indian relics—preferably some fellow about twenty-five or thirty, who lives in Colorado, Oregon, California, New Mexico—or, in fact, any of that Western country out there. I've done some collecting in the East and would like to swap yarns with some fellow who has had firsthand experience in the West. LESLIE L. LONGWORTH.
7 LeLoss Street, Framingham, Massachusetts.

## This Texan has strayed pretty far East.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: Although I was born in Ferris, Texas, and despite the fact that my parents were real Texans, I find myself up here in Boston, Massachusetts. I'm a little over seventeen, and crave some correspondence from hombres around my age who are fortunate enough to be living in the West. Hope soon to find my old letter box loaded with mail.
CHARLES NORTON.
157 Kingston Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

## Yes, ma'am, the Western country sure is hard to beat.

DEAR POSTMASTER BASSETT: I've traveled about nine thousand miles or so, and I want to say that I think the Western country is hard to beat, if you're looking for natural-beauty spots. I came from Ohio and have been all around that State and in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York. I've been in a few Western States besides. I'm interested in collecting post cards, and would exchange those of California for Mexico.
DOROTHY DAVIS.
523 West Sixth Street, Long Beach, California.

## Here's a good pard for some hombre.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: Is there any one out West on a ranch, or prospecting, or trapping, who would like to pal up with a clean-cut hombre of about thirty-two? I've traveled considerably, and have a pretty good grubstake to start us off with. J. W. MCALILEY.
139 Pinckney Street, Chester, South Carolina.

## From Portuguese East Africa:

DEAR POSTMASTER BASSETT: If any one of you hombres wants to know about Africa—East, South, or West—just drop me a line, and you'll hear, *muy pronto,* from this part of the world.

There is a lot of mining done here, and pearl fishing, and farming. Mozambique itself isn't much—just a little island about three miles long and a mile and a half broad, but it's a business center all the same. The farming folk on the mainland, five miles away, come here to sell all they grow, which consists of maize, monkey nuts, tobacco, and coconuts.

For those who are interested in hunting, I'll say that here on the mainland are elephants, lions, leopards, and buffalo. Of course there are a lot of crocodiles and rhinos! The government issues out fairly cheap licenses. In fact, you don't have to possess one for any game, bar the elephant.

Natives out here are the real savage. I know Africa well, but never came across a lot like these for working. My opinion is that they are the hardest-working savages I ever came across. This is a really interesting country for one to come to after a spell in the cities, although you do get lonely at times through not having regular mails. I hope some of you folks will approach me for snapshots, information, et cetera.
FRANK L. HENRIQUES.
Mozambique, Portuguese East Africa.

## This hombre wants farm life.

DEAR POSTMASTER BASSETT: Although I've had no experience in farming, I want to take it up some day, and, as I'm nineteen, the least time lost, the better. I'd appreciate a home on a farm or ranch somewhere out West, and would be willing to work for little or no wages. Is there any one who will offer me the chance?
P. T., of Massachusetts.
Care of Mail for You.

## Not an old-timer.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: I've worked on ranches in South Dakota and have also worked in mines. I know the West fairly well, although at present I'm living in the State of Illinois. No, I'm not an old-timer; I'm only twenty-one, and r'arin' to go. I'd like to hear from some folks who live in the far-out places of this little old world.
CHARLES J. HERBICK, JR.
Care of Cyrus Sanford, Woodstock, Illinois.

## Better write this hombre, *pronto,* folks.

DEAR POSTMASTER: I intend to be married in the spring and take my wife out West. I have a small amount of capital and would like to undertake ranching or farming on a small scale. Do you folks think it advisable? I want to locate where there is plenty of breathing space around us, and in a cattle country if possible. I can ride fairly well, and am one of the huskiest hombres you ever saw.

Would appreciate it if some of you cow waddies and old-timers would drop me a line.
TRACY LEDBETTER.
Route 3, Harrisburg, Illinois.

## Here's your chance, folks, to learn about Alaska.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: I'm located in Seattle, Washington, at present, but I am prepared to give a good deal of information about southwestern Alaska to any of you red-blooded hombres who want to find out about the finest stretch of country in the Northwest. I'm in a position to give all the dope you want about

mining, trapping, hunting, fur farming, et cetera, in southwestern Alaska. C. L. SMITH.
8614 Forty-fourth Avenue, South, Seattle, Washington.

## Hitting for the West next summer.

DEAR POSTMASTER: I don't know yet whether I'm going by motor or on foot, but I'm going West before summer! If I can get sufficient stake together to go by motor, I am equipped to take a couple of hombres along with me, for I have a good-sized tent and camping outfit. If any one who has a car would like to go along, I'd admire to hear from him.

However, the all-important thing is the working conditions en route. I expect we'd have to stop and work for a spell every now and then before we'd have the wherewithal to go on. What are the chances of getting work along the way? Let's hear from you Westerners on the subject. JOHN SEIFERT.
R. F. D. 4, Iron Hill, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

## From Lamesa, Texas.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: We have traveled a great deal. Have been in Old Mexico, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Some time during the next year we expect to go to California and Arizona. I'm only fifteen, and my cousin, who is with us, is twenty. We would both like to hear from some girls who are about sixteen or eighteen years of age.

ETHEL AND MAGGIE MOSER.
Box 167, R. A., Lamesa, Texas.

## From Central Oregon.

DEAR POSTMASTER: I'm from central Oregon, where hunting and fishing is the best in the world. Yes, that's saying something, isn't it? But I'm ready to back up what I say with plenty of facts. I'll be glad to hear from you-all who're interested in the life of the woodsman and hunter. By the way, I'm seventeen.

BEN A. BELLAMY.
Bellamy House, Madras, Oregon.

## Word from a little Southern hill town.

DEAR POSTMASTER BASSETT: I'd like to join up with you-all for a spell, as it's mighty lonesome in this strange little hill town down this way. I haven't traveled much as compared to some of you folks; in fact, I've not been outside the limits between Chicago and Pensacola, and I'm not much on writing, but I promise with all my heart, which happens to be a big one, to answer every one who's good enough to write. And I hope that will be right *pronto*, hombres. BUDDY SNEDEKER.
Kosciusko, Mississippi.

## A tenderfoot wants to hear from you-all.

DEAR POSTMASTER BASSETT: I'm a lonely tenderfoot, twenty-five years of age, who's spent most of her time wandering from city to city, along the Atlantic coast. I'd like to hear from people who live in the West, including Mexico; also from South America, Australia, and India.

PRISCILLA QUEEN.
Box 112, East Templeton, Massachusetts.

## An Oklahoman speaks.

DEAR MR. BASSETT: I'm a seventeen-year-old girl who loves the outdoor life, including horseback riding, of which I'm most awfully fond. I've never lived on a ranch or even visited one, and would like very much to make a few Pen Friends among some of the girls who enjoy ranch life. I hope you can help me out, Postmaster. OPAL FRAKES.
Box 386, Haileyville, Oklahoma.

## Pagopago, Samoa, sends word.

DEAR JACK BASSETT: I'm a sailor on one of the American warships in the South Sea Islands, and, as it's mighty dull down here, to say the least, I'd like to exchange a few letters with you folks who have a little time to spare. I'd also like to exchange a few snaps, as I have quite a collection of South Sea Island snapshots. Who'll be the first to visit this Pagopago land? CY MILLER.
U. S. S. *Ontario*, Pagopago, Samoa.

## Girls, a twenty-year-old miss from western Nebraska is waiting to hear.

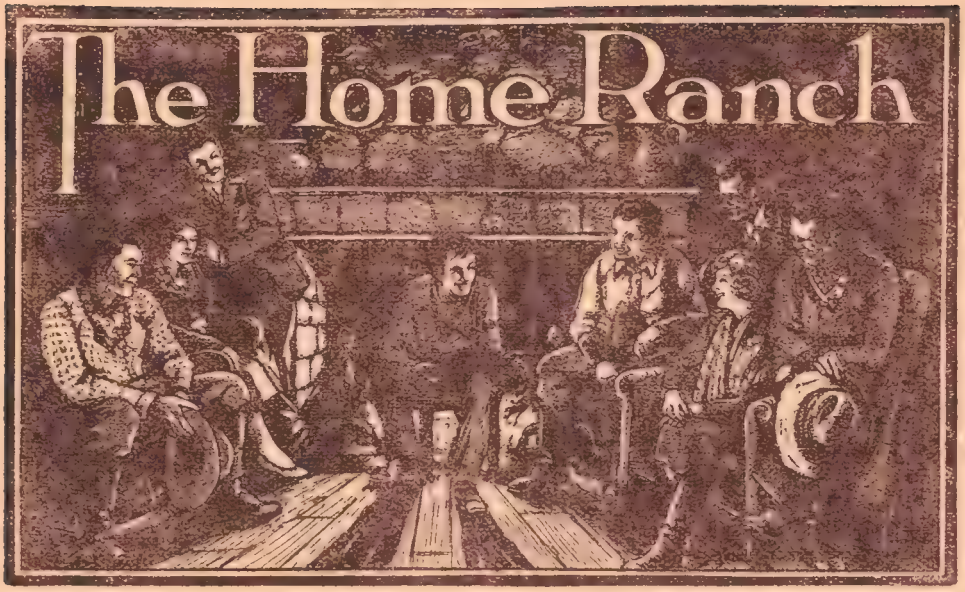
DEAR MR. BASSETT: I hope you can find some friends for a twenty-year-old girl who finds western Nebraska a very lonely place to live. I was raised on a farm, so I can exchange notes with farm girls if they wish. Or I will be glad to tell the city and town girls all about farm life. The main thing, Mr. Postmaster, is to please ask them to write.

ALICE V. WEGNER.
Box 146, Hay Springs, Nebraska.

"I live the greater part of the time on a farm, and can handle both a horse and a rifle very well," says Milton C. Grayhill, 833 Manor Street, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

William S. Barchet, 514 Cleveland Avenue, Evansville, Indiana, is twenty-five, and is looking for some friends with the Western stamp on 'em.

# The Home Ranch



BEFORE getting down to listening to some of the folks who have come here with interesting talks and yarns, it gives us much pleasure to announce to you that in next month's issue there begins a story by Max Brand, perhaps the best known, the most celebrated, and most beloved of all writers of Western stories.

This new serial, which Max Brand has just completed, was written expressly for FAR WEST ILLUSTRATED by its distinguished author. While at work on it, he constantly bore in mind the high standard that FAR WEST has set, and thus made every effort to make "Outlaw Valley" the very finest, all-round novel that he has ever written.

Max Brand knows, as we know, that, as to whether he has been successful in his effort to make this story his best to date, the decision can rest in one place, and in one place only—with you. Brand has done his best to make "Outlaw Valley" his best story. We did our best to procure this story for you, and our best to show Brand that he should make "Outlaw Valley" his best story, if it were in him to do so. Of these best efforts you may be assured, but will they all go for nothing? Or will we both be damned by faint praise, by your saying "Well, they tried." Or can you honestly say that Max Brand has written a whale of a good story in "Outlaw Valley?"

You may well imagine that Max Brand and the editor await your verdict with bated breath. But let's have it, anyway, won't you?

But the first installment of "Outlaw Valley" is not the only good thing in the next issue of FAR WEST ILLUSTRATED. No, not by a long shot. First, there is the last installment of George Gilbert's serial, "The Texan." Then, Harrison Conrad contributes a really very fine novelette. And among the short-story writers who have done *their* best to please you, are Paul Ellsworth Triem, Herbert Farris, Harley P. Lathrop, Frank Richardson Pierce, and Kenneth Gilbert. In addition to these features, there will be the usual fine assortment of entertaining and instructive articles by men who know what they are talking about, or rather, we should say, writing about.

Now for the yarns. First comes to take the teller's place before the fire. R. O. Staley, 516 Commonwealth Building, Des Moines, Iowa. Staley's tale rings with truth, and this, more than anything else, makes it hold for all who listen, a vivid and absorbing spell of interest.

"FOREMAN AND OLD-TIMERS OF THE HOME RANCH." In the summer of 1914, I was working as a railroad telegrapher, way up in northern Canada, in a new town called Hudson Bay Junction. This was about the farthest town north, at that time,

about one hundred miles from any other town of any size, and was the terminus for the new railroad which was just being built through to Port Nelson on Hudson Bay.

"Being located in the heart of the big timber, there were a number of logging camps starting, and, of course, there were present several hundred lumberjacks of almost every nationality, and also a couple thousand common laborers, working on the new railroad. Altogether they were about the toughest collection of human beings it would be possible to gather together. Common laborers made from six to eight dollars a day, and board. The logging companies, as well as the railroad construction companies, paid their employees in groups, so that from one to two hundred men received their pay checks each day and proceeded to get rid of the money in the usual way.

"Early in the spring of that year, there had been one of the biggest gold strikes of recent years in the Beaver Lake country, which was some one hundred miles north, and, as Hudson Bay Junction was the outfitting place for all the trappers and prospectors, you can well imagine the amount of money afloat.

"The town consisted of four hotels and saloons, which ran as wide open as any that are pictured in the movies. There was no such expression as 'closing time' for any of these resorts, and fortunes were made and lost every day. Human life was about as valuable as a worn-out newspaper, and much more plentiful. The smallest money in circulation was a two-bit piece, and board and lodging was from eight to ten dollars a day. Picture such a town, with its populace made up of the riffraff of big cities, living off the prospectors and laborers, and using every means possible to separate them from the money which was burning holes in their pockets. Had it not been for the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, the average citizen's life would have been short indeed.

"We always had a large amount of money on hand in the cash drawer, as well as in the safe, and twice a week would have from twenty-five to one hundred thousand in dust sent to the mint in Winnipeg. Almost every night, a shipment of gold coin and currency was returned to the hotels which were the bankers for the town.

"It was customary to bring the gold and valuables to the office of the hotel where worked, in the evening, and lock them in the safe, and I would take them out just before the train arrived. There was an armed man in the office with me all the time, until he accompanied the shipment on the train; and most of the time there was a Mounty, either in the office or within calling distance of the station.

"One night, there was an exceptional amount of trouble going on uptown, and my nerves were badly shot. Furthermore, the guard had slipped over to the Chinese restaurant to get lunch, leaving me all alone.

"I was sitting facing the front window, with my gun on and the express pistol—an army .45—lying within a foot of my hand, when, like a bolt from the blue, some one said, 'Put 'em up and be quick!' Well, I forgot all about the gun on the table; and didn't realize I had one on, and, even if I had remembered it, I was too darned scared to have hit the side of the wall. So I just naturally started scratching the ceiling. Believe me, I was sure reaching high.

"'Stand up,' were the next words, and I did as I was told and turned around to look into the end of a .45 that looked about as big as a stovepipe. And it sure was held there with a steady hand, while about the most piercing pair of eyes that I have ever seen were looking at me, between a blue handkerchief and a pulled-down hat.

"After ordering me against the wall and taking my gun away from me, as well as the gun on the table, both of which he threw out the window, the bandit then crouched down so that the lamplight did not shine on him. He kept me in the light, however, all the while, and ordered me to unlock the safe. I stooped down and started doing as I was told, and was so busy with the combination that I did not know just what he was doing.

"Suddenly there was a shot. The light went out and there followed two more shots and a crash as some one went through the window, taking some of the glass with him. I, of course, fell flat at the first shot and hugged the floor, not making a move. Two or three more shots again sounded back of the depot and a couple more about half a block away; then all was quiet for a minute, until a Mounty

stuck his head in the window and asked if I was all right. When I answered him, he said to light the lamp, call the fort, and report that he was off after the bandit, who had apparently taken to the woods.

"So far as I know, he was never caught. It developed that the fellow had seen the Mounty coming up the platform, and had shot out the light. The Mounty saw him going through the window, but by the time he had fired the two shots, he was through, and going on the other side. The Mounty ran around the depot and fired at what he thought was some one running, and the bandit let go at him about a half block away, when he was almost in the timber.

"I have often thought how lucky I was that night. The fact that I was taken so by surprise and was so scared was all that saved me. It would have been just like a fool kid, to try to start something, and that would have been suicide.

"I worked this job for a couple of months after this, and always breathed a big sigh of relief when there were no big money shipments. The Mounties were the most welcome men in the world in my office.

"I spent several years roaming around, and considerable time in the Far North, and have had a number of thrilling experiences, which, at the time, with the vitality and the pep of youth, seemed trifles. But to-day, I occasionally give myself up to a few minutes of retrospection, and I realize how lucky I am to be here, instead of just a memory.

"Aside from the war, I cannot recall any experience that so utterly paralyzed all my nerves, and where I was so near to 'going west' without a chance to defend myself, as that of those four or five minutes at Hudson Bay Junction. And I shall always wonder just what would have happened if the Mounty had not arrived, or worse, still, if I had forgotten the combination to that safe. I guess that must have been my lucky day."

Sits in here with us to-night, Miss May Tanton, R. F. D. 2, Arkansas City, Kansas. She's got a good dog story to tell:

"I was reading in The Home Ranch in FAR WEST ILLUSTRATED, the letter to Clem Yore, from John B. Dorsh, on hearing sounds from beavers, Boss and Folks. Also, in that same Home Ranch, you asked, Boss, for incidents of dogs coming home from a great distance.

"Now the dog is next to man, or woman, for faithful love. When a dog quits you, you are sure lost, for they will stand by you, in spite of kicks.

"Speaking of dogs, I owned one, a little woolly one. He was always lying in my mother's old rocking-chair. His name was Pat, and he was very bright.

"One day when he was five years old, some campers stopped at our place to get water. They thought Pat was so nice they would like to have him, so, for fun, I said if they could keep Pat, they could have him. Pat sat there and looked up at me. His ears drooped, as though he knew just what I said. So they patted him, and said 'You bet I can keep him.'

"Well, I never thought anything more about it; and the campers went away. I knew they could not keep him, for I knew Pat's heart was mine. Pat had been running around quite a bit of late, and I was on the outs with him for not being at home barking at things, and watching, as he ought to. I did not miss him for a day; then I got to worrying. I wondered if those campers had taken him. We knew the campers—they had been here in this city four or five times. They always stopped at our place, for my father was always good to travelers, and let them have water for their horses and cooking. Six months passed, and I cried and called myself foolish lots of times when I had to run the chickens out of the garden, and do hundreds of other things Pat had done while he was at home.

"Then one day we were all eating dinner. Mother was sitting close to the door. She looked out, and there was Pat, the poorest-looking dog I ever saw alive. His feet were bleeding from walking, and he was too tired even to eat. He would raise himself up the best he could, and lick our hands. We took care of him, and he finally got well, though he almost died.

"We got a letter, about a week after Pat got home, from those campers. They said Pat had run off, had been gone a month, and they would like to know if he ever came home. I wrote that he was at home and was going to live there until he died. He is nine years old, now, and he will never go to Fort Worth, Texas, again."

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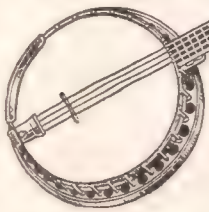

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